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Inroads to a 'Counter-System' of Contemporary Chinese Literature

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Abstract (English)

The study looks at the making and unmaking of Chinese national identity in the context of contemporary theories of 'world literature,' and investigates the internal struggle for positions and eventual consolidation of this 'literary space' into opposing 'systems' defined in terms of 'national' and 'international' principles. The aim is tripartite: to uncover the structural and historical characteristics of Chinese literary space in the context of 'international literary space,' to assert the means and motives behind the construction in the PRC of a 'literary system' to retain modes of discourse and monopolise a central narrative of 'Chinese' literature, as well as to register individual revolts against this system and collective reclaims to the 'space' through inroads to a '*counter-system*' outside the nation. Although a broad historical perspective is applied, specific attention is given to the period from the early 1980s to the present and the first generation of writers to emerge on the mainland in the midst of the Reforms and Opening; the study follows these writers' *visions in exile* from within the Communist literary system to its physical and imaginary boundaries, and in some cases onwards towards political exile abroad. The vision from the 'counter-system' provides alternative frames of reference and challenges politically charged narratives of 'belonging,' while at the same time questioning static conceptions of 'national identity' and the unequal distribution and appropriation of power in contemporary global cultural politics.

Resumé (dansk)

Afhandlingen følger konstruktioner af kinesisk national identitet i lyset af teorier om 'verdenslitteratur,' og undersøger den interne kamp for positioner og efterfølgende konsolidering af dette 'litterære rum' i modstridende 'systemer,' defineret på baggrund af 'nationale' og 'internationale' principper. Formålet er tredelt: at afdække de strukturelle og historiske særtræk ved det kinesiske litterære rum i kontekst af et 'internationalt rum;' at fastsætte baggrunden for etableringen af et 'litterært system' i den Kinesiske Folkerepublik, etableret med henblik på at indsnævre udtryksmuligheder, og monopolisere en central fortælling om 'kinesisk' litteratur; samt at registrere individuel modstand imod systemet, såvel som kollektive krav på det litterære 'rum' igennem et 'modsystem' udenfor nationen. Sideløbende med et bredt historisk perspektiv, bliver der taget specifikt hensyn til perioden fra begyndelsen af 1980'erne til nu, og den første generation af forfattere der dukkede op i kølvandet på de politiske reformer. Afhandlingen følger disse forfatteres *syn i eksil* (visions in exile) inde fra det Kommunistiske litterære system til dets fysiske og imaginære grænser, og i visse tilfælde videre til politisk eksil i udlandet. Udsynet fra 'modsystemet' tilbyder alternative referencerammer, og udfordrer politisk motiverede fortællinger om 'tilhørsforhold,' samt den ulige distribution og tilegnelse af magt i global kulturpolitik i løbet af de senere år.

Contents

Note on conventions

Chinese names and terms are rendered in Pinyin, except in cases with other accepted standards, and followed by characters the first time they are used. The 'full' *fanti* (繁體) script has been applied throughout for convenience of uniformity, except in Chapter Nine, where the original *jianti* (簡體) form is maintained in certain cases where specific texts in the two scripts are compared. Authors cited are listed in both *jianti* and *fanti* forms in the bibliography, where titles also appear in their original rendering regardless of their appearance in the main text. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from primary materials are my own; otherwise, translators are specified the first time in any given context.

Introduction
World Literature and Matters of 'Distance'

> 要想從孤獨中得趣而不得病，條件便在於對外對內都加以觀審，也就是說，大千世界也好，內心世界也好，都用另一個眼光加以靜觀，能夠超越自身的局限的這第三隻眼便是所謂的意識，或稱之為智慧。而智慧或意識又來自距離，換句話說，先退後一步，對人和事的觀察都得有一定的距離才看得清楚，才有可能做出恰當的判斷。
>
> To derive interest from loneliness instead of allowing it to become an affliction, one must examine both what is external and what is internal—in other words, use another eye to calmly observe the outside world as well as one's own inner world. This third eye, which can transcend the limitations of one's self, is what is known as consciousness, or even wisdom.
>
> However, wisdom or consciousness comes also with distance—in other words, with taking a step back. One requires a certain distance to be able to see clearly and make accurate judgements about people and events. (Gao 2002a: 4; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2007b: 164)

In *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* from 1998 there is a diagram of the 'symbolic representation of varieties of Chinese' (Pan 1998: 14; see also Figure One). Presented as four concentric circles, the diagram purports to signify the degrees of attachment, or 'levels of belonging,' of Chinese individuals to a 'centre' of Chinese culture—symbolised (obviously) by the inner-circle of the diagram and defined as territorially bound to the 'mainland.' The circle immediately following the core is split into four sections, marked variously as: 'Hong Kong,' 'Taiwan,' 'students,' and 'aspiring migrants.' Following this is a larger circle of 'overseas Chinese' and, finally, an outer circle marked 'assimilated.' Although the purpose of the diagram is allegedly to put forth a more nuanced perspective on the somewhat vague definition of 'overseas Chinese,' it also locates issues of identity in a geographically and politically bound *centre*, which suggests that cultural meaning arises first on the mainland and is then disseminated towards the margins. The present study does not suggest a complete reversal of this paradigm—the consciousness of a centre

and periphery of Chinese cultural identity looms large over the literary debates and questions of identity discussed throughout—but highlights instead the cultural action that takes place in the interstices or in-between these concentric circles. By focusing on the first generation of writers to emerge on the Chinese mainland in the wake of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and following their narrative and bodily distancing from the imaginary confines of the concentric circles, the study hopes to expose some of the discursive positions behind the *making and unmaking of Chinese national identity* at the dawn of the twenty-first century—and strives, ultimately, to displace the homogenising narrative emanating from the imaginary centre by looking through the 'visions in exile' on the margins of political and imaginative belonging.

The imaginary boundaries to questions of belonging, it will be argued, constitute real inhibitions for individual writers from the Chinese mainland; and while it is intended to delineate these forms of inhibition, the study will also show how writers try to manipulate or dislocate these boundaries and how the boundaries themselves are inscribed on multiple levels in the literary narrative. For these purposes, the concept of 'literary space' is borrowed from Pascale Casanova, which, despite a similar disadvantage of drawing circles, overcomes the more obvious drawbacks of the diagram in *The Encyclopedia* by making these referential to a wider space of 'world literature.' Within these frames, the study looks at specific writers active in the reinterpretation of the narrative possibilities in Chinese literary space, primarily in the three decades since the launch of the Reforms and Opening (改革開放) in 1978, but with a historical perspective that reaches farther back, to the early twentieth century, in the hope of uncovering the structural characteristics both of the idea of a national 'space' of Chinese literature, as well as the eventual split into contradictory positions loosely based on claims of 'national' and 'international' principles. This is devised in terms of what might tentatively be called the 'one space two systems' principle—designating the practical and symbolic reach of the Chinese Communist Party on matters of literature, and its counterpart: the voices exiled from the *system*, but not necessarily the *space*—the 'visions in exile' that form the core of the present recording of inroads to a 'counter-system' of contemporary Chinese literary space.

'Exile,' in this context, achieves a double purpose, and is employed presently and throughout, not only in the conventional sense of a 'prolonged absence from one's country imposed by vested authority as a punitive measure' (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*), but also in the sense of 'imaginative exile:' a deliberate (or forced) exteriority to narrative identified with the centre of the diagram. As Michael Seidel has argued, 'experiences native to the life of the exile seem almost activated in the

life of the artist: separation as desire, perspective as witness, alienation as new being' (Seidel 1986: x), and locates in this sense 'the implicit allegory of exilic imagining' as 'a necessary *elsewhere*,' structured by the relation between the 'allegorical' and 'mimetic' aspects of the literary narrative (ibid: 15). In the sense of 'a necessary elsewhere' doubly situated in allegory and mimesis—more than in its conventional sense of 'banishment'—*exile* becomes a prerequisite for the narrative imagination and turns into a dialogical process of escape and homecoming. This type of writing, which 'entails fleeing in order to survive' and 'refuses to be strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation' (Gao 1996: 20; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2007b: 81), as Gao Xingjian 高行健 (b. 1940) puts it, is almost invariably conceptualised in terms of the 'home' from which one is fleeing, even if this is devised purely in negative terms.

The 'visions in exile' are constantly played up against a 'central vision,' both inside and outside the Communist literary system, and emerges in the context of international space as a struggle for the 'right' vision. In this sense, 'space' is also useful as a visual metaphor when considered, for instance, in conjunction with to the idea of the 'window' to China or Chinese literature—which is recurring in statements by positions allegedly trying to 'bridge' the national space with the international. 'Spaces' with 'windows' to the outside world signal *enclosure* and *partial vision*: enclosure, in the sense that the window provides the only opening and might, one suspects, be shut at any given moment; by these measures, a vision *through* a window can ever only be a partial vision of the entirety, obstructed as it is by the rest of the enclosure. It is also understood from the application of this metaphor, that the inside of the enclosure is not immediately accessible to outsiders; it is something kept to oneself and protected, and only priced exemplars are displayed to the outside. The carving of alternative 'windows' might thus also seem a necessary task for writers to position themselves in international space, while at the same time *distancing* themselves from the monolithic perspective of the central vision. As Ma Jian 馬建 (b. 1953) once stated in an interview with a British newspaper, '[t]here is a saying that the further you stand from the mountains, the more clearly you see them. China is completely lacking in self-awareness and as someone who has stepped outside that society, I have a responsibility to write about it as I see it' (quoted in Merritt 2004). 'Stepping outside' can then be seen as having direct implications upon how the writer writes (to see 'more clearly'); however it also has implications upon how the writer is read—particularly when this occurs almost exclusively outside the national context.

While the attempted control over Chinese literary space by the Communist Party in the past sixty years has been largely effective on the national level, it has been less so in international

space—rather it has founded a basis for coherence among Chinese writers in opposition to the state, and provided the necessary conditions for an alternative vision of Chinese literature to be voiced outside the Communist literary system. The system is confined in terms of censorship, political control, etc., but also demands that narrative positioning be identified with the *centre* of the system by assuming a prescribed 'national form.' The alternate 'system' is only a system insofar as it defines itself against the former. It is opposed to censorship and political control in favour of the free flow of letters, people, and ideas across national borders, and can in this sense be seen as ascribing to an autonomous vision of writing and the values of 'world literature' rather than ideological conceptions of literary belonging as evidenced in the aggressive cultural policies currently pursued by the CCP. The notion of 'literary space,' however, is not necessarily different. The paradigm of world literature does not readily distinguish between the two 'systems:' although it might play a role to a lay international reader whether a writer is a 'dissident writer' or whether a book has been 'banned in China,' it most likely will not affect the perception of the cultural identity of a work or an author as, in the final analysis, Chinese. Lines are crossed when a writer adopts a foreign literary language, and thus in effect addresses a different literary tradition; but even here categorisations are blurred, when for instance a work reaches the imaginary international reader in translation and linguistic 'origins' are less obviously traceable than cultural ones. Even writers of hyphenated identities, such as the 'Asian-American' writer, do not easily escape their belongings either. Although a discernable tension is evident in the 'counter-system' of Chinese literary space between what might most simply be described with Ha Jin's (penname of Jin Xuefei 金雪飛, b. 1956) differentiation between 'immigrant' and 'exile' perspectives (Jin 2008b) (where the former obviously most actively tries to discard allegiances to the 'inner-circle') it is clear that from whatever 'perspective' this vision is projected, 'home' always lurks in the background—if only as a negative presence: a counter-reflection or 'distant echo' of current existence. The interesting contrast, of course, is when one turns to the Communist literary system, which clearly distinguishes between insiders and outsiders, and seeks to effectively banish conflicting visions from the official narrative of Chinese literature—and thus also, in a sense, to seal off the limits of Chinese literature in international literary space and carve only appropriate 'windows' for the outside spectator. Domestically, inside the Communist literary system, this is largely doable; outside, however, opposing voices continue to meddle in the Party's identity politics, despite the continued attempts to silence these voices by the authorities in Beijing.

In a closer study of these issues, the expansion of the academic field of 'world literature' over the past few decades has provided valuable theoretical frameworks. The concept has gained validity in the contemporary period, moreover, due to its alleged power to describe the changing conditions of creative writing in an era of (neoliberal) globalisation and transnational exchange. It has also provided new perspectives on the study of modern and contemporary Chinese literature—which has, throughout most of the twentieth century, but notably since 1949, proven notably resistant to the 'national paradigm'—by countering both the 'evolutionary' narrative (espoused by the New Culture Movement in the early twentieth century and inherited by CCP literary historians) as well as the tired dichotomy between 'China and the West' (that unfortunately continues to inform a large amount of the scholarship available). The preference for the 'one space two systems' approach is a way to overcome conventional east/west narratives as guiding principles in cross-cultural or transnational literary analysis. On the background of these issues, Chapter One provides an overview of the theoretical positions applied and presents the basic tension between the two systems, as well as the transnational forces that situate Chinese literary space within world literature.

In this sense, the study also caries on from some of the initial work done into this emerging research field; such as Gang Zhou's *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature* from 2011, which criticises the paradigm of 'the May Fourth vernacular movement as a Chinese phenomenon sufficient unto itself,' and suggests instead to see 'the Chinese case as a subset within a larger set—world literature' (Zhou G 2011: 137). This perspective can be seen as the offset to Chapter Two of the present study, which moves beyond the timeframe of the early Republican period (1912-1949) of Zhou's study, towards the period of dissolution and fragmentation of the literary field in the late Republican period. It is intended through this reading to consider, on the one hand, that the formation of Chinese literary space, as a *national literature* in an international community of other national literatures, occurred on the basis of an expressed idea of simultaneity (but not synchronicity) with an abstract concept of 'World Literary Time;' on the other hand, the chapter also aims to delineate the internal tension in the Chinese literary field between what might be termed 'national' and 'international' principles, which have guided debates on Chinese literature until the present day and formed the basic tension between the system and the sounter-system.

Although conceptualisation of modern Chinese literature is often connected specifically with Beijing and Shanghai as centres of both material and symbolic production, Chapter Three will

provide a brief examination of the decentralisation that followed in the wake of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), which rendered new centres both inland in Chongqing and Kunming, but also abroad in Hong Kong, Taipei, and beyond. While an exhaustive analysis of this dynamic period in Chinese literary history is beyond the scope of the present study, the Chapter will point to some of the early inroads to a Chinese literature beyond the nation—at the very point in history when the Communist literary system was making its early formative steps.

With a different focus but similar aims, the editors of *Global Chinese Literature* from 2010, Jing Tsu and David Wang, propose to overcome the traditional division between 'mainland' and 'overseas' Chinese literature by instead 'mak[ing] explicit the conceptual, disciplinary, historical, linguistic, and geographical tensions that occasion the emergence of Sinophone literature (華語語系文學)' (Tsu and Wang 2010: 1). The focus on 'Sinophone,' whether or not the definition includes the mainland, 'seek[s] to dismantle the hegemonic focus of a "national" Chinese literature and perhaps of a "national literature" at all' (ibid: 6). The present study shares the aim of reading across boundaries; however, with specific attention to the symbolic constitution of these very boundaries and the role the imagination of these still plays in transnational transactions and negotiations in world literary space. Along these lines, Part One of this study is aimed at drawing the basic outline of the various positions in Chinese literary space, as well as providing the historical background to the 'split' into disparate and competing 'systems.'

Part Two looks closer at the internal configuration of the Communist literary system since 1949 and lists the structural changes following the devaluation of Maoism in the 1980s, which provided a temporary space for a new generation of writers to question the state's ideological control on narrative. While Chapter Four follows the implementation of a new set of 'national forms,' intended to guide literary production on the mainland and tie literature closely to the political project, Chapters Five and Six record various challenges to the politicisation of literary space and situates the 'visions in exile' in opposition to this state-directed literary system in the course of the 1980s. Chapter Five focuses specifically on travel narratives and fictional works set on the peripheries of cultural, political, and geographical China. It is argued that the political borders of the PRC—specifically the far west, such as Tibet, and to a lesser extent Yunnan—become metaphors for decentring strategies directed against the cultural centre, and thus offer ample spaces for both physical and imaginary (dis)location. Key notions such as discovery or 'investigation,' which have traditionally guided the literary documentation of these 'outer regions,' are deliberately inversed to point back at the 'imperial eyes'—and thus to the 'empire' itself

(whether or not it considers itself as such). The imperative of 'mobility' (in the various implications of the term), which is raised throughout the chapter, reaches a devastating symbolic apex with the June Fourth Incident on Tiananmen Square in 1989, when the movement for social and political freedom was forcefully immobilised by the regime. Through a close reading of Ma Yuan's 馬原 (b. 1953) seminal work from 1985 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' 剛底斯的誘惑 [Lure of the Gangdisi], Chapter Six provides a further probing into the voluntary 'internal exile' in Tibet in the period leading up to this event—which provided a sanctuary both physically and spiritually distanced from the political centre. Ma Yuan's schizophrenic and 'ethnicised' narrative positions bring into play a veiled but pointed critique of the cultural policies of the Communist state: not merely in terms of reportage or other kinds of documentation, but by attacking the very roots of the representational structure in the PRC.

Part Two is in this way intended as a reading of the internal mechanisms of the Communist literary system, while at the same time pointing to the possibilities for displacing the system through imaginative exile and bodily displacement. Part Three moves on to the 'counter-system' by building on the principles of '*distance*' located in the internal contradictions to the hegemony of national forms. Chapter Seven lists the basic symbolic markers of the counter-system—June Fourth in particular; an incident that finally sealed the boundaries between the system and the counter-system, it seemed, when scores of writers, critics, editors, and academics went into political exile abroad. In the context of the attention to 'movement' in Part Two, the Tiananmen Incident is read as a case of violent 'non-movement:' the forced immobility not only of the Democracy Movement, but of broader processes of social enlightenment and creative emancipation, and the incitement to continue these abroad.

Chapter Eight takes a more pragmatic approach to the interrogation of the transnational imagination in contemporary Chinese literature by juxtaposing imaginative exile with political exile, and situating these according to the unequal distribution of power in the international literary system. By questioning issues of narrative *distance*, the chapter hopes to both displace and expand upon current research on exile writing while at the same time highlighting the specific nature of exile from the Communist literary system. Both real and imaginary boundaries are crossed when Chapter Nine proceeds to read across systems and spaces by comparing various editions of Ma Jian's travel book *Hong Chen* 紅塵 [Red dust] (2002), published in English as *Red Dust* and on the mainland as *Langji Zhongguo* 浪跡中國 [Wandering in China]. The parallel reading across these different editions opens for analysis of the tensions and energies between the system and counter-

system as well as between Chinese literary space and world literature at the turn of the new millennium. It will be shown that both the writer and the text are appropriated across international space to serve specific local concerns, and that 'extrinsic' narratives inscribe themselves in the text and sometimes complicate and sometimes facilitate the narrator's 'intrinsic' process of distancing from the literary temporality sanctioned by Beijing.

The measure of *distance*, then, channels the 'vision' in question: neither here nor there, it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It might allow one to 'see clearly and make accurate judgements about people and events,' as Gao Xingjian observes in the epigraph above, but it could just as easily make one disappear—which was largely Gao's case before the Nobel Prize (where his body of work was scarcely translated and Chinese editions available only in Taipei and Hong Kong in low print numbers). The Swedish Academy changed some of this, but lesser authorities have changed similar destinies. 'There is no international, only different locals' (Yang 2009: 9), runs the twisted lingo of Yang Lian 楊煉 (b. 1955); but there is also no question of the fact that Yang, as well as Gao, are both acutely attuned to the transnational system that makes a writer in the global literary economy: not too close and not too far, it all boils down to a question of *distance*.

Part One

Positions in Chinese Literary Space

Chapter One

One Space Two Systems: Chinese Literature and International Cultural Politics

The internal tension in Chinese literary space is nowhere more evident than in the context of the world literary system, when identities are put on display at large international gatherings claiming to serve interests of literature rather than strategic diplomatic relations. The Nobel Prize in Literature to Gao Xingjian in 2000 probably most clearly illustrated this point by giving rise to heated debates over whether Gao was a 'Chinese writer,' a 'French writer,' or something completely different, but also by exposing the uneasy positioning of Chinese literature in international literary space as well as the ongoing struggle between the system and the counter-system. The determination by the PRC leadership to exclude Gao from the official narrative of Chinese literature might have puzzled some observers at the time, but it is a strategy that has come repeatedly on show throughout the last decade: it is not so much the act of excluding specific expatriated writers from the narrative of the national self that characterises the Chinese state's involvement in this and similar cases, but rather the determination to exercise full control over Chinese literary space and manage the narrative of Chinese literature in international space from a centrally located and politically sanctioned position.

It was the same strategy that guided the Chinese involvement in the 2012 London Book Fair; but unlike the Nobel, the Chinese Communist Party was able to exercise a significant amount of influence on the 'packaging' of Chinese literature at this international event. But although government agents did all they could to silence opposing voices from presenting a conflicting vision of contemporary Chinese writing, protests from the counter-system were heard from the very

beginning. In particular Ma Jian drew attention to the active silencing of dissident voices (at home and abroad) by the Chinese state, and pointed out that despite the fact that no less than 180 publishers from the PRC were present at the Fair, they all worked as 'the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party' (quoted in Sherwin 2012). Before these issues can be probed further, however, it is necessary first to clarify the basic positions and work out a comprehensible strategy and framework for situating these in the context of world literature.

International literary time

The concept of 'world literature' carries diverse historical implications. While some might take it to include *all* writing *anywhere* in the world at *all* times, it is often taken—as David Damrosch does in the introduction to *What is World Literature?*—to 'encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language' (Damrosch 2003: 4). Although this is essentially a democratic vision of the world of writing, its implications have obviously changed considerably since Goethe (1749-1832)—who is usually cited as having coined the term in 1827. The concept has achieved a fundamentally new dimension in the contemporary period, moreover, due to levels of internationalisation and transnational exchange that Goethe could not possibly have envisioned.

The Routledge Companion to World Literature from 2012, co-edited by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir, contains an essay on Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910-1998) by Zhang Longxi, who points to Qian's cosmopolitan sensibility and extraordinarily wide range of scholarly references, both domestic and foreign, in his literary research. Zhang situates Qian Zhongshu in a transnational tradition of scholarship, but fails to move beyond the most common stereotype: the clear-cut dichotomy between China and 'the west.' Zhang writes that 'Qian Zhongshu may be said to represent the best of humanistic scholarship in twentieth-century China, a scholarship deeply entrenched in the tradition of more than *three thousand years of Chinese culture*, on the one hand, and, on the other, profoundly influenced by *the culture of the West*' (Zhang L. 2012: 81, italics mine). It is unclear how this tired dialectic made it into a volume on world literature in 2012; nevertheless it still informs and underpins a vast number of the narratives that accompany the writers discussed throughout the present study. Printed on the back cover of *Lee Valley Poems*, Yang Lian's 2009 collection of poetry 'wholly conceived and written in London' (as it reads on the back sleeve), is a quote from the *Scotsman*: W. N. Herbert writes that Yang Lian 'has a westernist,

modernist sensibility allied with an ancient Chinese, almost shamanistic one. He can both excite and frighten you—like MacDiarmid meets Rilke with Samurai sword drawn!' In addition to the spatial boundaries that are drawn—in order to be transgressed (or 'allied')—between two clearly differentiated literary and cultural spaces, there is also a temporal aspect at work in the assessment of Yang's poetry as well as Qian Zhongshu's literary research: the western 'sensibility' is not 'ancient' and the Chinese not 'modernist.' While the 'duality' of literary citizenship is often enforced by the writers themselves—*Lee Valley Poems* is bilingual (although the Chinese print is too small for satisfactory reading) with Yang credited as co-translator on the majority of the poems—the specific form of extraterritoriality that frames the 'narrative being' that emerges in the text or between the lines could be read in a much more flexible form than those of national or 'pan-cultural' structuralism.

In 1990 Stephen Owen wrote a review essay based on a translated collection of Bei Dao's 北島 (penname of Zhao Zhenkai 趙振開, b. 1949) poetry *The August Sleepwalker* (1988), which drew a good deal of criticism, but also raised some important points regarding international literary space that have not lost their relevance today. 'Poets who write in the "wrong language" (even exceedingly populous wrong languages, like Chinese),' he proposed, 'not only must imagine themselves being translated in order to reach an audience of a satisfying magnitude, they must also engage in the peculiar act of imagining a world poetry and placing themselves within it' (Owen 1990: 28). While in particular Rey Chow's criticism of Owen's essay was memorable,[1] Bei Dao himself pointed out that it was in fact not possible to talk about modern Chinese literature without considering the shaping factor of translation: on the one hand, the very inception of the 'modern' as opposed to the 'classical' (as will be discussed in Chapter Two) was facilitated by reading foreign works in translation, and many great writers of the Republican period were translators as well as creative writers; on the other hand, after the Communist takeover in 1949, which severely diminished the scope of public expression, the 'profession of translating foreign literature became a haven under the severe pressure of the dictatorship' (Bei 1993b: 61). After the implementation of

[1] Chow argues at the beginning of her introduction to *Writing Diaspora*, that while Owen 'criticises poets like Bei Dao for succumbing to the commodifying tendencies of transnational culture out of "self-interest," what is absent from Owen's musings is an account of the institutional investments that shape his own enunciation. This *absence* constitutes a definite form of power by not drawing attention to itself and thus not subjecting itself to the harsh judgement of "self-interest" that is so useful in criticising others. The elaboration and fortification of this kind of absence amounts to the perpetuation of a deeply ingrained Orientalism in the field of East Asian studies, of which Owen's practice is but one example' (Chow, R. 1993: 2-3). Owen's essay has been cited and discussed by a variety of other scholars (including Owen himself), which, disregarding the various positions assumed, provides ample evidence of its timeliness. See for instance: Owen 2003; Damrosch 2003: 19-24; Edmond 2012: 97-101; Lovell 2006: 135-136; Jones 1994.

the Communist literary system and the subsequent fixture of strict rules for literary expression, the 'translation style' became one of the only alternatives to official discourse—and thus one of the few places where a 'modern' Chinese literary language could develop and mature.

It would seem pointless, then, to look for the 'original' elements in a work once it has entered the system of 'world literature.' 'Beginnings' are already 'in-translation,' and what ends up classifying a work, as it would seem, in the 'wrong language' is often the author's 'in-betweenness'—or what, in postcolonial studies, has come to be known as 'hybridity.' This 'in-betweenness, however, is usually devised in terms of what it is 'in-between,' and thus appears to construct *new* 'hybridities' out of *old* 'beginnings'—sometimes in terms of the nation, and sometimes in terms of even more random categories such as 'the East' or 'the West.' A far too common reading of Bei Dao, Yang Lian, or other writers discussed throughout the present study, follows the equation put forth by Zhang Longxi and W. N. Herbert above: 'the writer X is an international writer because X successfully combines (classical) Chinese and (modern) Western culture.'

The concept of 'wrong languages' pointed out by Owen betrays in this case a specific pre-eminence of a 'right language,' which points to a specific hierarchy of world literature and the unequal power relations that are deeply ingrained in this system—despite its claim to be 'democratic.' Pascale Casanova is one of the few scholars to have attempted a broad theoretical outline or 'grand narrative' of this international system. She does so by applying the concept of 'literary spaces,' as already referred in the Introduction. In *La République Mondiale des Lettres* from 1999 (*The World Republic of Letters*, 2004) she proposes the concept of an international or 'world literary space' that stands in specific but not necessarily contradictory forms of opposition to a variety of 'national literary spaces' across the globe. '[I]n trying to characterise a writer's work,' she writes, 'one must situate it with respect to two things: the place occupied by his native literary space within world literature and his own position within this space' (ibid: 41). This parallel analysis of 'literary spaces,' says Casanova, affords a reading of a given work in an international context without downplaying an often national orientation, but always a location in *language*—which never possesses a 'neutral' value, but is structured along an international scale of 'literariness' (*littérarité*)[2] based on the scope and distinction of 'indigenous' literary traditions and

[2] 'For a language to acquire a high degree of literariness,' Casanova writes, 'it has to have a long tradition, one that in each generation refines, modifies, and enlarges the gamut of formal and aesthetic possibilities of the language, establishing, guaranteeing, and calling attention to the literary character of what is written in it. This tradition functions, in effect, as a certificate of literary value' (Casanova 2004: 18).

the degrees of consecration of 'literary fields' as entities that are relatively autonomous from state power.

The concept of 'literary space,' then, builds to some extent on the ideas of the 'literary field' developed at length by Pierre Bourdieu in *Les Règles de l'Art* from 1992 (*The Rules of Art*, 1996);[3] and similar to the literary field, actors in these spaces struggle for positions of recognition (measured in symbolic capital) and stand related in terms of 'national' or 'international' literary proprieties—which to some extent parallel Bourdieu's 'heteronomous' and 'autonomous' principles.[4] It follows that the 'avant-garde,' which are naturally the positions furthest removed from economic and political considerations in a given national space and thus function on relatively autonomous literary principles, are also the most 'internationally' inclined, the most cosmopolitan in outlook and practice, and those the most attuned to the dictates of 'world literary time.' Casanova calls this measure of *literary temporality* the 'Greenwich meridian of literature:'

> Literary space creates a present on the basis of which all positions can be measured, a point in relation to which all other points can be located. […] [T]he Greenwich meridian of literature makes it possible to estimate the relative aesthetic distance from the centre of the world of letters of all those who belong to it. This aesthetic distance is also measured in temporal terms, since the prime meridian determines the present of literary creation, which is to say modernity. The aesthetic distance of a work or corpus of works from the centre may thus be measured by their temporal remove from the canons that, at the precise moment of estimation, define the literary present. (Casanova 2004: 88)

Although Casanova's paradigm professes to dislocate writing from nationalist or essentialist entrenchments and situate it instead in a system that does not obey political demarcations but respects the free flow of letters and ideas in an increasingly interconnected and globalised world, it has not been immune to allegations of committing exactly these same errors. Criticism of Casanova's model has concerned accusations of ethnocentrism, partly due to the single-minded

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[3] Bourdieu's ideas of the 'field' were initially voiced in 'The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed,' tr. Richard Nice, *Poetics* Vol. 12, No. 4-5, 1983, 311-356; the essay is collected with related materials in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Randal Johnson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

[4] The literary field, as Bourdieu conceives it, is situated within the field of power, towards which it possesses relative autonomy (notably with regard to economic and political principles of hierarchisation). Although continuously affected by the laws of the field of power, two individual hierarchies exist within the literary field: the *heteronomous* and *autonomous* principle. While the heteronomous principle is measured in terms of book sales, awards, etc., the autonomous principle is measured by artistic or literary prestige accorded by positions within the field, which recognises no other measures of legitimisation than those founded upon the specific laws governing the literary field itself—thus generating the idea of 'the economic world reversed.' The most autonomous fraction of the literary subfield is generally considered to be poetry—which consists of a relatively small number of producers, with very few consumers outside the group of producers themselves. The opposite pole—historically consisting of drama (in the case of France), but through social and economic change coming to include the novel as well—consists of a relatively large group of producers with big audiences. The former group is thus logically least interpenetrated by external demands, and functions comparatively more according to its own internal semi-autonomous logic.

designation of Paris as the 'capital of the literary world' (Casanova 2004: 24) until the 'challenge,' since the middle of the twentieth century, by London and New York; but also due to the implied connotations of 'literature,' which extends to her use of the metaphor of the 'Republic of Letters,' as somehow 'universalising' a European idea of writing. In addition to these points, Casanova's use of the notion of 'inter-national competition' has also raised objections—specifically with regard to the apparent supremacy of *the nation* throughout a narrative that professes to theorise a borderless *world literature*.

The move to define Paris as a both physical and metaphysical centre of world literature appears indeed to be a case of oversimplification. The influence of French literature, particularly of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, on far-away corners of the literary world seems obvious, and the contention that writers from many of these areas, at one time or other during this period of 'high influence,' went to Paris to write—and accordingly sometimes received 'consecration' by the 'literary capital' (the keepers of literary time)—is also not necessarily out of the question. However, to apply this framework uncritically is no doubt a mistake. Helena Carvalhão Buescu writes that '[w]hat prevails is a French point of view, adopted for a French audience for which it was also originally intended, an intention that circumscribes the notions of world and republic,' and observes that Casanova's 'point of departure describes an ideal single vantage point […], whereas the reality is that different vantage points generate different competing descriptions […] and multiple worlds' (Buescu 2012: 130). Buescu is certainly right in this last observation, and also in the charge that Casanova seems too preoccupied with constituting Paris as the undisputed 'centre' of the world of writing,[5] however, this preoccupation is not necessarily only a reflection of ethnocentrism but seems also to be an attempt to highlight the unequal power relations between different literary spaces. Casanova's problem is that she is determined to make Paris not only a metaphysical centre for (particularly modernist) literature, but also a physical 'capital' of the World Republic of Letters. The move to make Paris, in this sense, 'doubly universal, by virtue both of the belief in its universality and of the real effects that this belief produced' (Casanova 2004: 30), seems unnecessary and only fuels accusations of the ethnocentric artificiality of the model: the argument appears too neatly constructed and alternatives or counterarguments are conspicuous by their absence.

[5] Casanova emphasises that French literary power has been relatively waning since the beginning of the twentieth century: 'It may be that we find ourselves today in a transitional phase, passing from a world dominated by Paris to a polycentric and plural world in which London and New York, chiefly, but also to a lesser degree Rome, Barcelona, and Frankfurt, among other centres, contend with Paris for hegemony' (Casanova 2004: 164).

What is really at stake, however, appears to be the question of what exactly constitutes 'literature:' who possesses the discursive power to define, qualify, rate, and distinguish *writing*—if we go as far as to presuppose from the outset that 'literature' concerns written material and excludes various forms of oral story-telling and the like. The notion of 'literature' entertained by Casanova can clearly be said to represent a European idea; it is not *ci*-poetry or the 'eight-legged essay'[6] but rather, and perhaps essentially, modern poems, plays and novels. In the restricted sense of the novel, for instance, Casanova's argument is not particularly far from Franco Moretti's notion of 'distant reading,' which also clearly operates within the idea of a 'literary *system*' that is structured around principles of a 'centre' and a 'periphery.'[7] Casanova, however, does not limit herself to the 'modern novel' but implies a much wider scope—the World Republic of Letters—which arguably opens her model to criticism, such as that put forward by Christopher Prendergast, that 'her description of the international literary system depends on a system of categories that is itself ethnocentric' (Prendergast 2004: 22).

Helena Buescu furthermore points to the fact that the concept of a 'Republic of Letters' (*Republica Litterarum*) emerged in Europe in the early fifteenth century, and concerned 'the nonexistence of national borders' and 'the awareness of intellectual continuities' in the assessment of literature as 'communal intellectual goods and practices that are or may be shared' (Buescu 2012: 126). Buescu emphasises the importance of acknowledging the 'non-coincidence' of 'the notion of letters' with 'the notion of literature' in this context: 'The republic included not only what came to be known as "belles-lettres" and then "littérature," but also different forms of scholarly and intellectual exchange, such as correspondence, historiography, and scientific exchange.' In this sense she criticises Casanova's use of the term, since '[t]he concept of letters is wider and more encompassing than the concept of literature, in terms of substance as well as of geographical, historical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics' (ibid: 128-129).

The 'World Republic of Letters,' then, is not to be equated with 'world literature'—neither in its contemporary form (in the sense Damrosch puts forth) nor in Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur*—

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[6] The '*ci*' (詞) or 'song' emerged in the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and originally intended to be accompanied by music (Idema and Haft 1997: 141-143), while the 'eight-legged essay' (八股文) was institutionalised as the standard for imperial examination essays during the Ming (1368-1644) (ibid: 187-188).

[7] In 'Conjectures on World Literature,' Moretti argues that 'in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials' (Moretti 2000: 58). Both Moretti and Casanova's mode of analysis can in turn be seen as inspired by Itamar Even-Zohar's 'polysystem theory' (Even-Zohar 1990).

and it differs from the historical conception of the 'Republic of Letters' in terms of both scope and positioning. What it does offer, however, is a vocabulary to assess the asymmetrical relations of power between works of creative writing, particularly of the modern and contemporary period, that are exchanged (also unequally) between linguistic areas around the world—areas that are often, but not necessarily, defined with reference to a specific nation state. Buescu's contention that Casanova 'builds her argument on the idea that the dynamics of the literary system may be *fully explained* through the rivalries and competitions between nations and their national literatures (one per nation)' (Buescu 2012: 129, italics mine) appears to be a case of intentional misreading. Casanova's proposition that a writer's work might be characterised by 'the place occupied by his native literary space within world literature and his own position within this space' (Casanova 2004: 41) does not seem to suggest that the literary system can be 'fully explained' through national rivalries and competitions; it does suggest, however, an element of 'rivalry' and 'competition' that is predicated partially on issues of nationality. It is clear that this is not felt with quite the same effect by a writer from a literary metropolis in Europe or North America as it is by one (in Casanova's vocabulary) from a 'minor literature' on the periphery of the World Republic of Letters. A Chinese writer (to stay with the program) might find him- or herself very much predetermined by 'the place occupied' by Chinese literature—or, more specifically, literature from the PRC—'within world literature,' even before anyone reads the actual work. As Tim Parks wrote in 2011, whereas an American writer, despite the accelerated internationalisation of literature, can continue 'to write in a traditional fashion and to address himself largely to an American readership' (because 'America is very much the object of the world's attention'), other writers, particularly those from 'minor literatures,' will have to package their works (or tolerate them being packaged) as a form of magical realist 'national allegory'[8] in order to enter this international literary system (Parks 2011).

While the 'national-competitive model' in this sense can be seen as the strength of Casanova's argument (insofar as it engages a structural account of the concerns addressed by Parks) it is also a weakness that opens it to criticism or even offhand dismissal. As already pointed out, the tendency to make everything fit too neatly into a coherent system might easily convey impressions of 'universal validity,' which in turn points back to the above charges of Gallocentrism. Christopher

[8] While the concept of 'national allegory' is intended here to point to 'national characteristics' or 'colour' in a more general frame, Fredric Jameson applied the term in a political sense in an essay from 1986, to point to a distinguishing trait in the 'Third World novel'—an argument he developed with specific reference to modern Chinese literature: 'Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*' (Jameson 1986: 69, his emphasis).

Prendergast argues that '[i]t is not that the national-competitive model is irrelevant; on the contrary, it can be made to do much useful work. […] It is simply that in her hands it is made to do *all* the work, accorded such grand explanatory powers that it is effectively posited as capable of accounting for everything' (Prendergast 2004: 11, his italics). Prendergast observes that variables such as class, gender, and region are sidetracked by the 'exclusive reliance on the category of "nation;"' a reliance that proves particularly harmful in connection with Casanova's concept of 'small literatures' (ibid: 14). Prendergast points specifically to a clumsy reading of Franz Kafka (1883-1924), but his contention that '[s]mall literatures do not "compete" with large ones, in the form of affirming ethnic "difference" against a potentially obliterating Other' (ibid: 15-16) is, as will be argued below, not entirely true in the case of the Chinese world of writing. As pointed out in the Introduction, Chinese literary space might be seen as containing at least two 'systems:' if what is generally conceived as 'China' today—namely the PRC, or, more specifically, the Chinese 'mainland' (excluding Hong Kong and Macau)—is accepted as the location of 'Chinese literature,' then it is clearly a controlled literary space—policed by government censors (restricting access to world literature) and involved in promoting Chinese 'soft power' abroad, clearly with the intent of 'competing' with larger, more influential, literatures. However, if 'Chinese literature' is made to connote a much broader area such as 'Sinophone literature,' as is the scope applied in the edited volume *Global Chinese Literature*, mentioned in the introduction, or the even broader range of 'cultural China' applied by Tu Wei-ming in the early 1990s,[9] then it yields different spaces with different centres, that are characterised by struggles that are perhaps not so much driven by 'national competition,' but operate within a rather more intricate, multi-centred, transnational space. And in this case, Casanova's model goes some of the distance in explaining the energies and tensions present in and between these spaces. As the editors of *The Global Literary Field* from 2006 point out, '[t]he predicament of the outsiders looking in, craving to obtain recognition for their writing in an established field dominated by

[9] Tu originally put forth the idea of 'cultural China' in a 1991 issue of *Daedalus*, which evolved into the edited volume *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today* from 1994. Intended to displace prevalent discourses of ethnic classification of 'Chineseness,' Tu proposed a cultural approach that included the interaction between 'three symbolic universes: (1) mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, (2) overseas Chinese communities throughout the world, and (3) the international communities of scholars, students, officials, journalists, and traders who provide a global forum for China-related matters' (Tu 1994: viii). Working from a similar scheme of concentric circles as found in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, mentioned in the Introduction, Tu argues that 'the centre no longer has the ability, insight, or legitimate authority to dictate the agenda for cultural China. On the contrary, the transformative potential of the periphery is so great that it seems inevitable that it will significantly shape the intellectual discourse on cultural China for years to come' (Tu 1991: 27).

institutions located in powerful nations, is really what Casanova's book is all about' (Guttman, et al.: xii).

Despite ideals to the contrary, then, it seems that while national and linguistic borders are transgressed in the continuous internationalisation of literature (and cultural products in general), these same borders remain discursively fortified and are redrawn as new regimes of narrative empowerment in the 'literary economy' of the contemporary world of writing. 'Chinese literature,' as Andrew Jones wrote in 1994, 'clearly remains relegated to a kind of "cultural ghetto" on the outskirts of the "global village," despite the best aspirations of its creators, critics, and translators toward "upward mobility" in the transnational literary economy' (Jones 1994: 171). From the perspective of the early 2010s, one can broadly subscribe to Jones' observation. Despite the Nobel Prize to Gao Xingjian in 2000, 'Chinese literature' has not moved significantly out of the 'cultural ghetto' on the periphery of the World Republic of Letters; but on closer inspection, however, this particular event might in fact be seen as a watershed in a process of separation between 'international' *Chinese literature* and *Chinese literature* of the PRC—the 'system' and 'counter-system' that constitutes a unique dynamics in contemporary Chinese literary space. The prize, in this case, was certainly not given to a nation, but perhaps rather to a writer with a 'negative' national identity. The most obvious difference between the contemporary position of 'Chinese literature' in international space and the position at the time of Jones' essay, then, is the gradual solidification of the distinction between the 'national' and the 'international' systems. Sides have been chosen in no small amount due to the cultural policies of the Chinese state, which has made it less and less feasible to emerge as an 'international writer' within the Communist literary system, and at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, made it difficult to be anything but a 'national writer' (a political writer) in international literary space—since, as Stephen Owen pointed out above, the international audience demands a certain amount of 'local colour' combined with 'universal images' in its approval of works from 'minor' literary traditions (Owen 1990: 28). Although this does not leave a Chinese writer entirely without agency in the global literary economy, it does constitute the Chinese state as a both witting and unwitting mediator in the consecration of international literary capital for Chinese writing; and following the 'rise' in international standing of the PRC in the last two decades, political efforts have been stepped up to move Chinese literature out of the ghetto and into a position commensurate with China's 'international status.'

The international position of Chinese literature and the quest for 'soft power'

The recent initiative by the Central Committee to pursue an international policy of 'soft power' and to significantly boost the revenue for the cultural sector and its promotion abroad says a great deal about the international image of Chinese cultural production at the present time—as well as about the PRC leaders' determination to correct this image. Although Chinese economic and political power has risen dramatically in the world since the program of Reforms and Opening was initiated in 1978, it is clear to most observers that Chinese cultural power (or 'soft power') has hardly followed the same pace. In his speech at the 17th National Congress of the CCP in 2007, President Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 (b. 1942) emphasised that '[c]ulture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength' (quoted in Lei Y. 2007; see also *People's Daily* 2007). Faced with this situation, it is essential to 'vigorously develop the cultural industry, make the cultural marketplace thrive, and increase international competitiveness' (ibid). Although statements like these might smack of conventional CCP lingo, the call to 'increase international competitiveness' expresses not only a desire to boost markets for Chinese cultural products at home and abroad in terms of economic profit, but also a keen attention to the relationship between 'cultural influence' and geopolitical power in the long run. As Hu remarked in an address at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee in October 2011, partially published in the Party journal *Qiushi* 求是 [Seeking truth] in January 2012, 'the overall strength of our national culture and its international influence does not correspond with the international status of our nation' (Hu, J. 2012; see also: Wong, E. 2012).

The potential reach of soft power has been felt close at hand by the CCP leadership, which generally blames 'western cultural imperialism' for causing the 'spiritual pollution' (精神污染) among Chinese youth that has given rise to calls for democracy and civic rights over the years and has forced the government to clamp down hard on the perceived roots of these influences at regular intervals both before and after abandoning the isolationist policies of the Mao era. In the same address, Hu Jintao warns that 'we need to face up to the fact, that international hostile forces are intensifying their strategic plot of westernising and dividing our nation, and the ideological and cultural domains are the key points for their long-term infiltration' (ibid). Besides the staggering level of paranoia, what is interesting in these statements is the use of military discourse to describe

cultural flows: the 'international hostile forces' that strategically 'plot' a 'long-term infiltration' of China, is a discourse that vividly recalls the Maoist era and one that appeals to nationalist sentiment and responsibility in the face of an impending enemy. It is obviously intended to achieve maximum effect in the pursuit of a 'harmonious society' (和諧社會), a policy that has been on the agenda since 2005 with the alleged purpose of promoting internal stability and growth, but also a policy that has significantly stepped up the Party's moralising function in both public and private spheres.[10] The evocation of the spectre of 'evil Western nations' is not only a symptom of Cold War nostalgia, but also a means of locating cultural production in nationality and highlighting the political purpose and significance of art.

The measures adopted to curb this 'infiltration' are well known, and have involved strict control over the field of cultural production, combined with harsh penalties for what the government considers dissent or 'incitement to subvert state power' (煽動顛覆國家政權). The recent high-profile cases of Liu Xiaobo 劉曉波 (b. 1955) and Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (b. 1957) are only the tip of the iceberg—English PEN estimates that 'China continues to have the largest number of writers in prison of any country, in absolute terms' (English PEN 2008)—but clearly indicate an increase in the politicisation of the cultural sphere. In early January 2012, Xi Jinping 習近平 (b. 1953) emphasised in a statement on CCTV that '[u]niversity party organs must adopt firmer and stronger measures to maintain harmony and stability in universities. Daily management of the institutions should be stepped up to create a good atmosphere for the success of the party's 18th congress' (quoted in Chen, S. 2012). Indeed, 'stability' appears to have become the new keyword in the party-state's effort to maintain social control and divert objections to one-party rule. As Anne-Marie Brady points out, it is well understood among the CCP leadership, that 'social stability equals political stability' (2012: 193), and by adopting a more 'persuasive' rhetoric in favor of the 'instructive' or coercive political propaganda of the Maoist years, the state has managed to silence a large amount of the population, and 'succeeded in "marketing dictatorship" not only to the older generation, but even to its large population of globalised, urbanized, ICT-savvy youth—the same group who forged the colour revolutions in the former Eastern Bloc in the 2000s, and political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011' (ibid: 183). However, while the state's

[10] On the various questions and implications involved in the pursuit of a harmonious society in present-day China, see for instance the volume *China in Search of a Harmonious Society*, edited by Sujian Guo and Baogang Guo (2008).

strategy of 'persuasive propaganda' and valorisation of harmony and stability has been largely effective at home, it has proven significantly more difficult to export.

One strategy to increase Chinese 'soft power' in the international arena in recent years has been the opening of Confucius Institutes at academic institutions around the world. Since 2004, the Hanban (漢辦)—or 'Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language,' a non-governmental organisation affiliated with the Ministry of Education—has reportedly spent over 500 million USD on the founding of 350 Confucius Institutes worldwide (Golden 2011). The institutes resemble other state-sponsored cultural centres, such as the Alliance Française, designed to promote national culture and language abroad, except for the fact that the Confucius Institutes are physically located at universities (and usually also subsidised by these institutions), and thus potentially closer to research—or in the vocabulary of 'soft power:' 'ideological propaganda.' Indeed, there have been reports of the Hanban trying to directly influence research at American universities, particularly on issues like Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan (ibid), although generally there appear to have been only minor tensions. In *China In and Beyond the Headlines*, Lionel M. Jensen argues that 'so far there have not been any events in which the academic freedom of the host university was *explicitly* threatened by authorities of Hanban. […] This, though, does not mean that U.S. Confucius Institute directors do not take special care in arranging programming that is uncontroversial in the eyes of their benefactor,' which, in the final analysis, 'amounts to a persistent self-censorship, a practice common to the political survival experience of Chinese citizens today' (Jensen 2012: 293). Although Jensen's paranoia might to some extent resemble Hu Jintao's fear of infiltration by 'international hostile forces,' it is perhaps not too far off the mark to suggest that Xi Jinping's desire for 'harmony and stability' at universities in China might extend to foreign 'sister universities' through the Confucius Institutes. The Confucius Institutes represent a strategic intervention in the perceived 'international' narrative of Chinese culture by aggressively pushing the CCP-sponsored 'official' narrative—a narrative that not only claims Chinese cultural authority for itself, but actively pursues the silencing of counter-narratives.

It is the same aggressive strategy that is at work when Chinese writers are scrutinised in preparation for international literature festivals in order to ensure that it is only the desired ('national') narrative of Chinese literature that is exported abroad. At the 2009 Frankfurt Book Fair, for instance, where China was the year's 'guest country' (similar to the London Book Fair mentioned above), the writers Dai Qing 戴晴 (b. 1941) and Bei Ling 貝嶺 (b. 1959) ostensibly had their invitations revoked at the request of the Chinese governmental agency participant to the

agreement, the General Administration of Press and Publication (中華人民共和國新聞出版總署)—the agency that also manages censorship at home.[11] The GAPP had sponsored the translation of more than a hundred Chinese books into German and English as part of its 7.5 million USD investment in the fair, and apparently expected a full turnaround. On the officially approved program were writers who toe the line between political acceptance at home and decent sales abroad, such as Yu Hua 余華 (b. 1960) and Mo Yan 莫言 (b. 1955). Both would be considered provocative, or even 'controversial,' according to most literary standards, but by refraining from directly questioning the legitimacy of the CCP and the Chinese state they have managed to achieve not only commercial success, but also a considerable amount of symbolic capital in both national and international literary spaces. But even though the latter went on to declare in a keynote, that 'a writer has a nationality, but literature has no boundary' (Mo 2010), this is evidently only so at face value. Boundaries are continuously drawn, and at least some agents in this scheme clearly perceive the issue as a 'struggle' between national literatures and cultures. Others have different objectives, often to sell books, but in the process of doing so similarly participate in the boundary drawing between literary identities.

Julia Lovell, who has written extensively on China's 'Nobel complex' in the post-Mao era (2002; 2006; 2010), explains that 'China's sense of entitlement to Western-based international plaudits reveals both a confident belief in China's superiority *and* an anxious need for that belief to be affirmed by the West,' and that '[i]nsecurity about Chinese national identity and the obsession with a diseased Chinese culture have often produced their inverse: a cultural machismo, angrily sensitive to slights and humiliations, that asserts China's cultural uniqueness' (2006: 7). This, again, returns to the question of the narrative of Chinese culture and identity on the international arena, or as it often seems to be implied, 'the west'—which, despite decline in a variety of other sectors (most notably the financial), still constitutes the symbolic centre of literary time in the eyes, according to Lovell, of the vast majority of the Chinese cultural sector. When praise is accorded in this 'international' literary economy to so-called 'dissident' Chinese writers it naturally reflects badly on the state.

[11] The issue was widely covered in the press at the time and related to a symposium preceding the actual fair, where the Chinese delegation performed a walk-out in protest over the participation of Dai and Bei, and only returned after an official apology was made by the director of the fair Jürgen Boos. The controversy raised concerns over the random political silencing of these supposedly 'dissenting' voices, not to mention the blind compliance by the German organisers. While the organisers chose to blame the project manager Peter Ripken (who was fired after the event), he in turn pointed to the German foreign ministry (see: Höbel and Lorenz 2009; Erlanger and Ansfield 2009; Flood 2009).

The Nobel Literature Prize in 2000 to Gao Xingjian—not only a 'dissident' writer in the official PRC narrative, but a writer who had renounced Chinese citizenship (in 1997)—was in this sense a particularly bitter pill to swallow. But as Horace Engdahl (member of the Swedish Academy) argues, the Nobel Prize 'is intended as an award for individual achievements and is not given to writers as representatives of nations or languages nor of any social, ethnic or gender group' (Engdahl 2008: 197). Was the furore that arose, then, simply related to the combined arrogance and insecurity of the PRC government in international affairs as Lovell suggests? In the press release by the Swedish Academy, Gao was praised for 'an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama' ('Nobel Prize for Literature 2000'), and Casanova points out that 'Gao is not, as the international press would have it, a political dissident. He is a literary dissident who long ago broke with the prevailing norms of his literary universe:'

> Far from crowning a 'national' oeuvre that reflects a contemporary Chinese history and milieu, the Nobel Committee honoured a genuinely autonomous body of work that, by integrating the norms of literary modernity (inevitably Western, given the configuration of literary power relations today), has been able to reconceive, in the Chinese language, the forms of an older Chinese literature. In no way, then, can the Nobel Committee be said to have made a political or diplomatic choice. Its decision in this case was truly free, literary, and literarily courageous. (Casanova 2004: 151-152)

Although Casanova's argument certainly appears valid, and supports her general theory of international literary space, two things escape her analysis. One thing, which has already been discussed in some detail above, is that to the Party-sponsored Chinese literary critic literature is still, by the early 2010s, largely a political issue. As evident in Hu Jintao's statements above, despite a significant liberalisation of the cultural sector since the end of the Cultural Revolution the 'value' of art is still predominantly conceived in terms of political propaganda (or 'soft power'), intended to serve national interests and the governing state body: to maintain harmony and stability at home and promote Chinese cultural 'influence' abroad.

The other thing that might be taken to compromise Casanova's analysis to some extent concerns the alleged 'political or diplomatic' impartiality of the Nobel Committee. Lovell draws our attention to the fact that, in the press release from the Swedish Academy praising Gao's 'oeuvre of universal validity' rather than applauding 'his achievements in existentialist, nonreferential avant-garde drama,' only his two novels—*Ling Shan* 靈山 [Soul mountain] (1990) and *Yige Ren de Shengjing* 一個人的聖經 [One man's bible] (1999)—as well as 'his play with the most specific political setting,' 'Taowang' 逃亡 [Escape] (1990)—are treated to any considerable extent (Lovell

2010: 210). Despite the writer's attempt to deemphasise the play's socio-political specificity,[12] it is difficult to read *Taowang* outside the framing of June Fourth—an event that still carries a devastating symbolic significance outside the mainland—and the two novels, in Lovell's reading, 'fail to achieve the open-ended scepticism characteristic of Gao's plays,' and remain 'obsessions with China'[13] (ibid: 211). 'The academy's praise conveys a backhanded compliment,' argues Lovell, 'as it admits a Chinese writer to world literature: "universal validity" in Chinese literature seems still to return to "obsession with China," as exemplified by the romantic tendencies in Gao's fiction' (ibid: 212). Lovell goes on to describe the predominantly negative reactions in the mainland literary field, even among the avant-garde, which quickly gave rise to 'an acute sense of nationalistic copyright over the representation of China in contemporary global culture' (214). This sense of 'copyright' does not appear to have decreased since then, and the London Book Fair in April 2012 gave rise to a similar controversy as the one in Frankfurt three years earlier. This time the Chinese delegation brought with them a new weapon—or rather an old weapon in new dress: the English-language journal of Chinese literature.

Politics of translation: English-language literary journals

The international publication *Chinese Literature* was set up as the organ of distribution of English translations of Chinese writing abroad already in 1951. Published initially by the Cultural Press (文化出版社) as 'collected materials' (叢刊) rather than a journal proper, the names of neither editors nor translators were provided in the initial years. The inaugural issue opened with a lecture by the seasoned Party ideologue Zhou Yang 周揚 (1908-1989), entitled 'The Practice of Mao Tse-tung's Thought in Chinese Art and Literature,' and featured several works of propaganda for the Chinese side in the Korean War (1950-1953)—among them, a piece by Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) praising the 'Chinese People's volunteers in Korea.' In 1954 it was taken over by Foreign

[12] In the notes to the manuscript of the play, Gao emphasises that '*Escape* is about the psychology of political philosophy. It should not be made into a play of socialist realism, which seeks only to mirror contemporary political incidents' (Gao 1990: 64; tr. Gilbert C. F. Fong, Gao 2007a: 67).

[13] The coining of the phrase 'obsession with China' is usually ascribed to C. T. Hsia, who devotes an appendix in his seminal work *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* to the 'moral burden of modern Chinese literature.' Hsia uses the term to distinguish the 'modern' phase of Chinese literature (the Republican period) both from the traditional and Communist 'phases' in terms of 'moral contemplation:' 'its obsessive concern with China as a nation afflicted with a spiritual disease and therefore unable to strengthen itself or change its set ways of inhumanity' (Hsia 1999: 533-534).

Languages Press (外文出版社) and turned into a quarterly,[14] and Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981), who had become minister of culture after the establishment of the PRC, was brought in as Chief Editor—a position he served until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and again from 1980 until his death in 1981. From the very first issue, the journal also featured contemporary and classical art, apparently with the purpose of guiding not only the representation of Chinese literature in international space, but a much wider sphere of Chinese cultural production. It obviously carried translations of works that fitted the code for proletarian writing in the PRC and were considered exemplary enough to represent China's political vision (which incidentally coincided with its literary vision) in other countries throughout the world. In 1964, a French version, *Litterature Chinoise*, was established as a quarterly to serve the same purpose.[15] In its heyday in the 1980s, the journal reportedly had an international circulation that exceeded 60.000 copies per issue (Xu S. 2007).

The initiation of the Panda Books series in the early 1980s—which collected in book form many of the translations previously featured in *Chinese Literature*—was a further attempt to increase the promotion of modern Chinese fiction abroad. As Robert Hegel concluded his review of the series in another recently established (1979) contributor to the international exposure of Chinese writing, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, in 1984: 'the Panda Series of translations is not free from flaws. Yet it reflects a tremendously ambitious desire to make Chinese writing known and appreciated abroad. Clearly the periodical *Chinese Literature* and even the regular publications of Foreign Languages Press were viewed as insufficiently productive' (Hegel 1984: 182). Although this certainly appears to have been a correct prediction, the hope that '[i]t may be possible for the first time to give American undergraduates a view of the *real breadth* of China's writing' (180), that concludes his evaluation, seems in hindsight a bit too optimistic.

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[14] The Foreign Language Press (外文出版社) was founded under the Ministry of Culture in 1950 with the purpose of overseeing translations of Chinese literature and its distribution abroad. Although an overwhelming amount of political material dominated the publications in the initial years—its 'major project' was allegedly *The Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Chan, R. 2003: 155)—translations from the canon of modern Chinese literature and classical works were also commissioned. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang were responsible for a significant number of the English translations—for instance Lu Xun's *Selected Works*, which appeared between 1956-1960.

[15] The journal went through a variety of metamorphoses during its time of publication. In 1958 it went from a quarterly to a bi-monthly, so that readers might be 'more promptly supplied with new writing which reflects life in China today, as well as with accounts of fresh developments in Chinese literature and art' (back cover to No. 1, 1958 issue), and in 1959 to a monthly. During the heavy politicisation under the Cultural Revolution the French edition also turned into a monthly, and both versions bore clear imprints of the national cultural policies in the revolutionary years. After the Cultural Revolution, both versions were once again reverted into quarterlies.

In 2000 *Chinese Literature* was revised once again, this time as a bi-monthly, fully bilingual journal. Despite the optimism of its editors, it was to be its last year running, and its publisher at the time, Chinese Literature Press (中國文學出版社), was shut down. In the January/February issue (No. 1, 2000), a notice on the first page 'To Our Readers,' in English, and 'Gaikan' 改刊寄語 [notice on changing the journal], in Chinese, the editor accounts for the continued perseverance of the journal:

> 我們刊物的主旨在於全方位、多側面地反映我們的文化，給我們的文化精神一個立體的、有血有肉的形象，使它不再只是停留在頭腦中抑或紙上的模糊輪廓。衣冠雖異，風景不殊，我們會盡力讓你觸摸到我們數千年文化傳統的脈搏，聆聽先賢譜就的繞梁至今的樂音；同時也會盡力為你呈現當今繁花競豔、百音齊作的文化景觀。
> Continuing to reflect various aspects of the Chinese culture [*sic*], *Chinese Literature* will give the reader *a panoramic and vivid image of the spirit of the Chinese*. It will enable the reader to feel *the pulse of the millennia-old heritage of China* and will present the reader with a blaze of colour in the garden of contemporary Chinese culture. (Li 2000: 1; my italics)

The unsuspecting reader is faced with a return to the narrative of the 'genius of a people:' it is a communication of a cultural 'spirit' and a historical 'heritage'—a national package, rather than a collection of individual literary voices. At the same time, the bilingual design (which was new to *Chinese Literature* at the time) relocates the receiver—not necessarily to domestic readers, but probably more likely to the growing number of foreign students of the Chinese language. Although almost pedantically bilingual throughout, the editors perform a significant blunder in the inaugural issue, and fail to supply the table of contents with Romanised versions of the authors names; they thus ostensibly alienate readers with no capabilities in Chinese—who had been the journal's target group since its inception.

Alternately, and with significantly more modest ambitions, *Renditions*, another English-language literary journal, was founded in Hong Kong in 1973 as a translation project rather than with any specific agenda in terms of influencing World Literary Time or 'competing' with other national literatures. Unlike *Chinese Literature*—which, in the early 1970s, resembled a political pamphlet more than a literary journal—*Renditions* carried, as it does today, a wide spectrum of writing that started in the Chinese language: classical and early modern fiction, poetry and essays, as well as literature from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and beyond. In the 'Foreword' to the inaugural issue, Vice-Chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Li Choh-Ming 李卓敏 (1912-1991) makes clear that the aim of the publication is to make 'accessible to Western readers *selected Chinese writings* in the humanistic fields:'

> In this age of greater intercultural communication a new interest in the art of translation is evident. We are here primarily concerned with serving this interest by providing a place for the practice of Chinese-English translation. In the process, we hope that it also affords *some fresh glimpses and insights into Chinese life and thought*. (Li, C. 1973: 3; my italics)

'Glimpses' into Chinese life and thought is a by-product of the primary concern of translation; there appears to be no claims to the 'totality' of Chinese culture: rather than a 'panoramic and vivid image,' the editor hopes merely for 'glimpses and insights.' Eva Hung has compared the two journals with a third, *Chinese Pen*, privately founded in 1973 and published in Taipei, and concluded that, taking into consideration their various differences, '[t]hey all seek to present to the English reading public a view of Chinese literature seen from a particular Chinese point of view' (Hung 1995: 249).

For the present purposes, Hong Kong and Taiwanese literature are considered representative of individual literary fields, or perhaps 'intermediary literary spaces'—distinct from, but naturally with a significant degree of interaction and complex historical intertwinement with the mainland field. They clearly partake, however, of Chinese literary space, and serve as important platforms for the counter-system, given the relative freedom of publication and public discourse. Despite the significant divergence between the journals in terms of both purpose and intended reach, they might be made to signify the conflicting forces, or 'systems,' in the constitution of 'Chinese literature' in world literary space from the early 1970s onwards. While the former (the *system*) was tied to a specific national state and overseen by political interests, the latter (the *counter-system*) was transnational and (at least relatively) autonomous of political involvement. When Beijing superseded the international mandate to Chinese statehood from Taipei in 1971 it naturally added to this accumulating tension; a tension that has since then played out as a struggle for the right to represent China in international literary space. More specifically, it has resembled a struggle between one key player, the Chinese Communist Party, and a variety of other players, positioned sometimes in compliance and sometimes in opposition, but always with a certain amount of contradiction to this self-sanctioned nexus of Chinese literary identity.

In November 2011, the quarterly *Pathlight: New Chinese Writing* was established as the 'English edition' of *Renmin Wenxue* 人民文學 [People's literature] (the top official literary journal in the PRC, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four), and allegedly inspired by *Peregrine*, the bi-monthly English-language supplement to the literary journal *Chutzpah* (see Lovell 2012). Published under the Writers' Association as an official companion to *Renmin Wenxue*,

Pathlight should naturally be considered closer to government control than this later journal, which is commercially subsidised and furthermore contains non-PRC writing, as well as original compositions in English—in addition to mainland literature. Both publications, however, should be considered to fulfil the same purpose, as an excited reporter from *Global Times* infers:

> *Excellent Chinese literature* has been undiscovered for too long and it's high time it gained more worldwide appreciation. Today, many foreign publishers appear to be clamouring to discover new Chinese writers, but they often don't know where to begin. These translated Chinese literature magazines step right into the void and provide them a proper platform to find *celebrated Chinese writers*. (Shen L. 2011; italics mine)

Again, the central question is obviously: 'celebrated' by whom? Who gets to define what constitutes 'excellent Chinese literature' in absolute terms? The article goes on to relate a meeting between a delegation from *Pathlight* and the British *Granta* magazine, after which Qiu Huadong 邱華棟 (b. 1969) of the former is quoted with the statement: 'We can act as a window to them, providing access to the abundance of Chinese literature' (ibid). The window is indeed an apposite metaphor, providing a framed view of 'celebrated Chinese writers' and deliberately obstructing those not so 'celebrated' from view. Politics apparently plays no part in this matter, if we are to believe the *Global Times* article; it has strictly to do with concepts of World Literary Time, as Qiu reasons: 'It turns out that our idea of "good" works almost perfectly coincide [*sic*] with that of foreigners!' (ibid). 'Art is our ruler,' he insists, '[w]ith a wide scope and an open mind, we choose articles that truly exemplify and represent the abundant and complicated realities of our country, past and present. We will display only the highest level of Chinese literature' (ibid). The type of Chinese literature that currently sells well abroad, and is often perceived as treating 'sensitive' topics, is rejected in no mistakable terms, this time in the voice of the reporter: 'In the past, most Chinese novels published in the West were mainly about the Cultural Revolution, but, in China, many of these novels are widely thought to be poor in quality' (ibid). Despite the boldness of this statement, considering the virtual unavailability of these 'poor quality' novels to the general reading public in the PRC, it is not an uncommon one. Neither is the conclusion, that '[t]hese books are quite influential abroad, regarded as a *window to China*. But in fact scenes in these stories are *far from the reality of life in China*, and they reflect even less the reality of today's China' (ibid, my italics). It is a matter of who gets to frame the 'window to China,' a struggle for the right to *narrative*—not only the right to assert 'the highest level of Chinese literature' in world literary space, but also the right to define the analytical apparatus behind the constitution of artistic

greatness. Where these novels of 'poor quality' fail, are in their inability to depict 'real life' in China: they are 'far from the reality of life in China,' and by virtue of this 'untruthfulness' they are rendered 'bad literature'—not according to a political agenda, we are ensured, this has strictly to do with *artistic quality*.

The launching of *Chinese Literature Today* in 2010 appears to have been more successful. It functions as a joint operation between its parent journal, *World Literature Today*, the University of Oklahoma and Beijing Normal University's College of Chinese Language and Literature; additionally, it receives funding from China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. It gives prominence to 'cultural understanding' and contains background and in-depth essays from scholars all around the world, and suggests that 'Westerners need a publication that offers readers the contextual materials required to open meanings hidden by the lack of historical, cultural, or linguistic knowledge in the West' (Stalling 2010: 5). To aid this 'lack of knowledge,' the journal subscribes largely to Beijing's vision of Chinese literature, and includes Taiwanese writers—such as Li Ang 李昂 (b. 1952)—while conspicuously excluding voices from the counter-system. The 'historical, cultural, or linguistic knowledge' that is supposedly not immediately available to 'Westerners,' seems to be that 'Chinese literature today' coincides precisely with the political vision of technocrats in China's central administration, rather than writers themselves, and incidentally also includes writing from China's imperial claims.

With reference to the World Republic of Letters, then, it might be gathered from the above examples that the Communist literary system—managed, as it is, from the top down by government institutions and agencies—intends, in Casanova's vocabulary, to 'compete' with other national literatures in international literary space, while at the same time conducting an internal battle against the 'counter-system' of Chinese literary space. Most obviously perhaps, the cases of the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs illustrate the desire to promote the Party-sponsored narrative of contemporary Chinese literature, while actively trying to silence conflicting narratives. The purpose of blocking out these other voices is obviously political—exiled writers will be inclined to say things the political leadership has no desire to hear. However, the drive to push forth 'national' writers in international space is slightly more complicated: soft power disguised as autonomous literary principles. The aim is to compete in international literary space on the principles that guide the World Republic of Letters; which is then intended to achieve a political effect at a later point. It seems that the cultural policymakers have accepted a slower-paced accumulation of international

literary capital than in the revolutionary years, but the determination to have absolute and centralised control over 'Chinese' literary space appears not to have ceased. On the other hand, the writers who stand outside this centralised narrative, and are actively excluded from the narrative of national Chinese literary space—both in the Communist system and at the London and Frankfurt Book Fairs—do not appear to principally engage international literary space on behalf of a nationalised narrative; on the contrary, their efforts appear to have a much more 'internal' character: their opponents are the censors inside the PRC, not other national literatures or 'biased opinion-makers' in control of the institutions that sanction literary capital.

In order to uncover the deep structures of Chinese literary space on the one hand, and the two 'systems' on the other, a brief historical survey of the discursive and material conditions might add clarity to the contemporary situation. Despite the cosmopolitan nature of literature, it is given that the formation of national literary spaces is closely connected to the formation of nation-states themselves, and is thus from the outset 'heteronomous' in nature (i.e. involved in politics or issues other than *literature* in the strictest or most highbrow sense); the relative 'autonomy' of literary spaces is a cumulative process and a consequence of the establishment of the structural requirements for literature to detach itself (as a 'field') from direct political involvement. The 'older' a literary field is, the greater an opportunity it has to develop notions of '*l'art pour l'art*' or similar ideals of literary purity—but also to distinguish itself in the context of world literary space as not merely 'copying' the central dictates of the 'modern' but involved itself in the creation of the *literary present*. These issues will be turned to in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

Imagining Literary Space: Issues and Positions in the Republican Period (1912-1949)

The so-called 'beginnings' of Modern Chinese literature (中國現代文學) are not unlike many other latecomers to the World Republic of Letters reducible to a handful of iconic texts and literary figures (usually designated 'fathers,' or something of the kind, by later literary historians) that in various ways correspond to the 'ideal of the modern' as defined by the keepers of central literary time. Dating is thus also fairly convenient, and usually coincides with the publication of manifesto-like texts that are often distinguished by being *both* transnational and national in orientation. In China, the key texts are generally considered to be Hu Shi's 胡適 (1891-1962) 'Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi' 文學改良芻議 [Modest proposals for the reform of literature][1] (January 1917), followed closely by Chen Duxiu's 陳獨秀 (1879-1942) 'Wenxue Geming Lun' 文學革命論 [On literary revolution] (February 1917). Other texts by these and other writers might appear more informed or well argued, but they were later, and thus symbolically inferior. These works also have the advantage of being followed relatively closely by the (according to conventional wisdom) 'first' fictional work in the cannon of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881-1936) 'Kuangren Riji' 狂人日記 [Madman's diary], published in May 1918, thus facilitating the conclusion that the

[1] The manifesto-like quality of this text is most clearly evident in the programmatic 'eight don'ts' put forth by Hu Shi to guide the literary reform. This is also by far the most frequently quoted passage of the essay: '(1) writing should have substance, (2) do not imitate the ancients, (3) emphasise the technique of writing, (4) do not moan without an illness, (5) eliminate hackneyed and formal language, (6) do not use allusions, (7) do not use parallelism, (8) do not avoid vulgar diction' (Hu S. 1970a: 467; tr. Kirk Denton, Hu S. 1996: 123-124).

literary 'revolution' (or 'reform') had taken place somewhere between these dates.[2] The task of the following chapter is not to test the feasibility of these assumptions in any sustained way, but rather to look at certain aspects of the negotiation for positions in an emerging conception of a national literature in the early decades of Republican China.

The invention of modern Chinese literature

The above three texts were all incidentally published in the journal *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 [New youth], founded by Chen Duxiu in Shanghai in 1915 under its provisional name *Qingnian Zazhi* 青年雜誌 [youth magazine], and subtitled '*La Jeunesse*.' The journal quickly became synonymous with 'revolution in thought' and 'literary revolution,' but narrowed its focus in the early 1920s to the promotion of Marxism in particular (Chen P. 2011). A propaganda poster from the early 1970s depicts Lu Xun in front of an agitated mob, and reads: 'study Lu Xun's revolutionary spirit, criticise the ways of Confucius and Mencius;' in his hand he carries a rolled-up copy of *Xin Qingnian* (see Figure Two). Although Chen Duxiu fell in and out of favour with the Party,[3] he was still one of its founding members, and it seems that iconisation of this particular publication as *avant*-everything in modern Chinese literature has met little resistance in later literary histories (CCP-sponsored or otherwise).

Xin Qingnian was surely of central importance in the construction of modern Chinese literary space, but literary journals had flourished since the turn of the century, and created a readership and the structural possibilities for a nascent field to emerge in the 1920s. Liang Qichao's 梁啓超 (1873-1929) *Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說 [New fiction], founded in Yokohama in 1902, was probably the earliest

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[2] General reference is made to the 'literary revolution of 1917,' and the year appears in book titles, such as *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Shi, 1917-2000* 中國現代文學史 [History of modern Chinese literature, 1917-2000] (Zhu, Zhu and Long 2007). Some scholars prefer the year of the May Fourth demonstration, 1919, from which the literary 'founding fathers' took their name (e.g. Idema and Haft 1997: 259). The uncritical narrative about the 'literary revolution' and its instigators, the 'May Fourth generation,' has come under criticism of late. For instance David Der-wei Wang writes in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*: 'For most of the twentieth century, the May Fourth Movement was celebrated as the harbinger of modern China in almost all domains. More than a historical event or literary crusade, it took on a mythic dimension, one that signals the magical beginning of Chinese modernity. But, with the further passage of time, we have come to realise that the revolution sparked by the May Fourth Movement did not happen overnight; rather, it resulted from slow and multiple processes of reform in the nineteenth century […]' (Wang in Chang and Owen 2010: 467).

[3] See Feigon 1983: 196-229.

journal to dedicate its pages exclusively to literary matters,[4] and particularly the long-running and widely popular *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* 小說月報 [Fiction monthly], with the English title *The Short Story Magazine* (1910-1932), was a central actor in the emerging field since its inception in 1910 till its demise in 1932—following the bombing of The Commercial Press (商務印書館) by the Japanese Imperial Army.

The 'May Fourth generation' is usually considered the 'founding fathers' of modern Chinese literature, which would probably hold true, if a case like that could ever be made; however, the deliberation of this position naturally has the disadvantage of obscuring the elements of the field that were already in place by the late 1910s. In context of *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*, Denise Gimpel has argued, that 'by their constant production of writings in new and varied forms, the first generation of writers had already provided a space in which fiction had established itself as a medium of expression and could thus, with time, be moulded into ever new shapes and patterns' (Gimpel 2001: 226). This 'space' of writing—in the sense of providing both the early traces of a literary field as well as the 'politico-cultural acceptance and desirability of a genre of writing that, some few decades previously, had been proscribed' (ibid)—was taken over by the 'second generation,' the May Fourth generation,[5] although with the added factor of nationalism; but also, and probably in the course of the imagining of statehood following the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命), a significant difference can also be detected in the rhetorical mobilisation of the concept of 'the west'—as well as the pragmatic implication on Chinese writing that usage of this fluid signifier entailed. While there was a strong desire amongst both generations to 'strengthen China' (whether empire or republic) in the face of the world, it was clear that the concept of literature had already matured considerably in the intervening decade. Chen Pingyuan writes that the split between the two generations of literary reformers lay in the fact that 'focus had shifted from the educational uses of literature to seeing European literature as an example for emulation,' and goes on to assert that 'Liang Qichao and others also looked towards Western literature as a model, but the point was still to talk about traditional education. Chen Duxiu and others similarly talked about how literature would benefit the national economy and people's livelihoods, but they stressed studying and learning from European art' (Chen P. 2011: 91). Not so much a mere tool of instruction, literature

[4] The inaugural issue featured Liang's own, and widely influential, essay 'Lun Xiaoshuo yu Qunzhi zhi Guanxi' 論小說與群治之關係 [On the relationship between fiction and the government of the people].
[5] The most comprehensible introduction to the May Fourth Movement in English is still Chow Tse-tsung's *The May Fourth Movement* (1960) although inquiries into this dynamic period in Chinese literary history have never ceased.

had evolved into a field of serious scholarly attention, which came to show in the selection of works for translation and in the execution of these translations, but nowhere more strongly than in the *transnational* attitude to literature that became visible in the theoretical writings of particularly Hu Shi from the late 1910s onward. Hu's idea of a 'national Chinese literature' betrayed a desire to distinguish not between east and west but between centre and periphery—or as he more bluntly puts it, the 'first' and 'second rank'—of a literary world that ostensibly defied national borders, but that, by its very existence as such, made available the means for national identification while avoiding terms like 'wholesale westernisation' or, indeed, the offhand bifurcation of *Chinese culture* and *western culture* as meaningful analytical tools.

It probably seems unnecessarily anachronistic to call Hu Shi a transnationalist, but on closer inspection it is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume that he was familiar with some of the basic principles that we connect with the concept today. The first appearance of 'transnational' in scholarly discourse, it is generally held, was in Randolph Bourne's (1886-1918) essay 'Trans-national America' from 1916.[6] Bourne graduated from Columbia University in 1913, the year before Hu Shi enrolled in the same institution. Both studied under the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), and although the former went on to distance himself from Dewey, Hu Shi maintained close friendship and collaboration with his mentor throughout his life. It is unlikely that Hu was unfamiliar with Bourne's essay, which was widely debated in American scholarly circles at the time when Hu Shi was still enrolled at Columbia and first of all appeared to take issue with Dewey himself. (This latter point might account for the fact that Hu Shi apparently never mentioned Bourne in his own writing.) Before venturing into more fanciful speculation, it should simply be noted that the ideas were there and available, and that Hu Shi's writings, as shall be demonstrated below, display a transnational approach to the construction of modern Chinese literature—in addition, obviously, to a burning nationalism, which was more or less the *lingua franca* to him and his peers in the New Culture Movement (新文化運動) in the early twentieth century.

When Hu Shi published 'Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi' in 1917 he was still completing his doctorate at Columbia and on his seventh year abroad on a Boxer Indemnity Scholarship. The long sojourn had

[6] Although Bourne's essay, in the words of Leslie Vaughan, 'put forward a counter-narrative of "transnationalism" to challenge both the ideas of "100% Americanism" and cultural pluralism, and to propose a new conception of American identity that was both ethnic and modern, American and cosmopolitan' (Vaughan 1991: 443-444), it should be noted that Bourne's 'higher cosmopolitan ideal' (Bourne 1977: 263) was confined largely within a national framework. Transnationalism to Bourne was still a form of multiculturalism, and scholars have pointed to the 'close association between such versions of American internationalism and the ideology of exceptionalism' (Tyrrell 1991: 1052).

not only acquainted him with ideas current among the intellectual elite in the United States, such as those of Dewey and presumably Bourne, it had also equipped him with a sufficient amount of symbolic capital to ensure that his return to China later that year was to general applause amongst the supporters of the emerging New Culture Movement and a professorship at Beijing University. Although the essay named literature as its specific point of inquiry, it was clear that it was deeply entwined in contemporary nationalist discourses as well: while it employed the highly emotional intellectual vocabulary of the day, which involved the antagonistic juxtaposition of the 'old' and the 'new' in a very dramatic way,[7] the essay also constituted a decisive step in a programmatic effort to standardise vernacular Chinese (*baihua* 白話) into a new 'national language' for China—a programme that, in turn, was tied specifically to the implementation of the structural possibilities of a *national literature*.

The vision of a coalition between a national Chinese language based on the vernacular and a 'national literature' became even clearer in 'Jianshe de Wenxue Geming Lun' 建設的文學革命論 [On a constructive literary revolution], which Hu Shi published the following year, after he had returned to China, also in *Xin Qingnian* (April 1918):

> 我的「建設新文學論」的唯一宗旨只有十個大字：「國語的文學，文學的國語」。我們所提倡的文學革命，只是要替中國創造一種國語的文學。有了國語的文學，方纔可有文學的國語。有了文學的國語，我們的國語纔可算得真正國語。國語沒有文學，便沒有生命，便沒有價值，便不能成立，便不能發達。
>
> The point of my 'treatise on the construction of new literature' contains only ten words [*literally*: 'ten big characters']: 'literature in the national language and a literary national language.' The literary revolution that we are advocating for simply aspires to construct a literature in the national language for China. Only when [we] have a literature in the national language, can [we] have a literary national language; and only after [we] have a literary national language can our national language be considered a genuine national language. If a national language has no literature, then it has no life and no value, then it is unable to consolidate and grow. (Hu S. 1970b: 345)

[7] See for instance Chen Duxiu's 'Jinggao Qingnian' 敬告青年 [Call to youth], published in the inaugural issue of *Qingnian Zazhi*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1915), which might be considered the earliest programmatic effort by the *New Youth* camp to formulate the ideological paradigm of 'positive' and 'negative' temporality, that was to permeate the discourses of the New Culture Movement: 'Youth is like early spring, like the rising sun, like trees and grass in bud, like a newly sharpened blade. It is the most valuable period of life. The function of youth in society is the same as that of a fresh and vital cell in a human body. In the process of metabolism, the old and the rotten are incessantly eliminated to be replaced by the fresh and living… If metabolism functions properly in a human body, the person will be healthy; if the old and rotten cells accumulate and fill the body, the person will die. If metabolism functions properly in a society, it will flourish; if old and rotten elements fill the society, then it will cease to exists' (Chen D. 1954: 240, tr. Ssu-yu Teng and John Fairbank).

Since the Republic of China was still a recent invention, it is perhaps not surprising that Hu Shi's 'treatise on the construction of new literature' is so solidly framed in a nationalist paradigm. The 'literature in the national language' is, strictly speaking, only part of a much larger program: namely the 'imagination' of China as a modern nation-state distinct from its imperial past and in an ideally egalitarian relationship with other nations.[8] However, the explicit focus on the vernacular as the only useful 'literary language' (which was to say print- and thus 'standardised' national language), as opposed to the elitist *wenyan* 文言 (classical Chinese) had in this case a specific transnational character. Hu was uncompromising in his break with the past, and by looking to Europe he was able to detect a model for the development of national languages—and thus 'imagined national communities' (to use Benedict Anderson's term)—that was tied specifically to literary production and had a potential and verifiable universal applicability:

> 我這種議論並不是「嚮壁虛造」的。我這幾年來研究歐洲各國國語的歷史，沒有一種國語不是這樣造成的。沒有一種國語是教育部的老爺們造成的。沒有一種是言語學專門家造成的。沒有一種不是文學家造成的。
>
> My argument is not taken out of the blue; in my research on the history of the national languages of various European countries over the past few years, there has not been a single national language that was not created in this fashion: not a single national language has been created by the old men in the Ministry of Education, not a single one created by professional linguists, not a single one that was not created by literature. (Hu S. 1970b: 348-349)

Hu Shi roots his argument in a parallel between *wenyan* and Latin as 'dead' languages in the face of the 'living' vernaculars (a parallel he had already drawn in the former essay), and points specifically to the example of Dante's (1265-1321) advocacy of literature in the vernacular as opposed to Latin. The supposedly comparable character of the transitions from classical languages in various European literatures to the Chinese context—and the connection between these processes and the construction of national languages and states—made it possible for Hu Shi to regard the project of the New Culture Movement as part of what Gang Zhou has called a 'transnational vernacular movement' (2011). This was naturally not a synchronous 'movement,' nor even remotely resembling a homogeneous one, but rather a pattern of literary 'modernisation' that lay implicit across disjointed temporalities and in diverse national-linguistic contexts. It functioned according to a logic of 'time,' which consequently rendered Chinese letters 'backward' according to the Greenwich meridian of literature. In 'Wenxue Gailiang Chuyi' Hu Shi had already noted (in

[8] It became painfully clear only a year later, with the signing of the Versailles Treaty of 1919, ceding the former German concessions in Shandong to Japan, that this relationship was indeed only *ideally* egalitarian.

parenthesis in the original text) the evolutionary model for modern literatures and languages that he was to expand in 'Jianshe de Wenxue Geming Lun;' a model that was ultimately also available for China:

> （歐洲中古時，各國皆有俚語，而以拉丁文為文言，凡著作書籍皆用之。如吾國之以文言著書也。其後意大利有但丁（Dante）諸文豪始以其國俚語著作。諸國踵興，國語亦代起。路得（Luthor）創新教，始以德文譯舊約新約。遂開德文學之先。英法諸國亦復如是。[…]故今日歐洲諸國之文學，在當日皆為俚語。造諸文豪興，始以「活文學」代拉丁之死文學。有活文學而後有文言合一之國語也。）
> (In the Middle Ages in Europe, each country had its own vulgar spoken language and Latin was the literary language. All written works used Latin, just as the classical language was used in China. Later, in Italy appeared Dante and other literary giants who first used their own vulgar language to write. Other countries followed suit, and national languages began to replace Latin. When Luther created Protestantism, he began by translating the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament* into German, which ushered in German literature. England, France, and other countries followed this pattern. […] Hence, all contemporary literature in the various European nations developed from the vulgar languages of that time. The rise of literary giants began with a 'living literature' replacing a dead literature in Latin. When there is a living literature, there will be a national language based on the unity of the spoken and written language.) (Hu S. 1970a: 476; tr. Kirk Denton, Hu S. 1996: 138)

The claim to 'universality' by this model was crucial inasmuch as it created a precedent for the radical language reforms advocated by the New Culture Movement; but on a deeper level it expressed a paradigm shift in the approach to literature away from the largely 'autarkic' tradition that had, it was argued, confined literary possibilities within established indigenous models for the last two millennia, and to adopt instead a 'transnational perspective' that placed Chinese literature in the context of a 'world literature;' a context that supplied a pattern of development to which all great literary works, disregarding their origins, ultimately subscribed: 'literature in the national language and a literary national language' was a dual process, one unthinkable without the other.

Having reiterated the laws of the 'transnational vernacular movement' that he had lined up a year before, and thus situated his argument in a paradigm of supposedly universal applicability, Hu Shi proceeds in 'Jianshe de Wenxue Geming Lun' to draw up a pragmatic program in two steps for the 'constructive literary revolution' that involves the basic necessities of 'tool' (工具) and 'method' (方法). The 'tool' needed to generate the possibility of a national Chinese literature is, as stated, essentially the modern vernacular; and in addition to actual practice (Hu Shi argues that the majority of those who oppose the vernacular are actually incapable of writing in it), the acquisition

of this tool might initially be realised through the reading of classical Chinese novels in *baihua*.[9] He subsequently proposes a series of exercises to enhance the 'method' of writing, since the possession of proper tools alone will not be adequate for the 'creation' (創造) of a new literature. However, although Hu is able to theorise the matter at length he is in need of actual models: 'I have thought it through thoroughly, and there is only one approach [to the problem]: as quick and on as large a scale as possible to translate famous works of western literature to serve as our models' (357).

Hu Shi's analogy to the emergence of national literatures in Europe constructs a paradigm that contains, on the one hand, the modern national literatures of the world—a group that is comparable in terms of development and consecration, and a group that Hu Shi wishes Chinese literature could join (given that it conforms to the rules and standards of development). But on the other hand, it also suggests the existence of a type of superior literature, a 'literature of the first rank' (a 'world literature'), which is the result of the consecration of vernacular national literatures, but one that also transcends national boundaries to be emulated by the rest of the world: it is only the 'works of famous authors' that are to be translated, not 'second-rank works and below' (359)—a program that was probably not radically different from the ones laid out by European intellectuals on the literary periphery:

> 我以為國內真懂得西洋文學的學者應該開一會議，公共選定若干種不可不譯的第一流文學名著：約數如一百種長篇小說，五百篇短篇小說，三百種戲劇，五十家散文，為第一部「西洋文學叢書」，期五年譯完，再選第二部。譯成之稿，由這幾位學者審查，並一一為作長序及著者略傳，然後付印，其第二流一下，如哈葛得之流，一概不選。詩歌一類不易繙譯，只可從緩。
> I think that scholars in the country who truly understand western literature ought to have a meeting, and jointly decide upon the number of famous first-rank literary works that it is essential to translate. An approximate number for the first instalment of *Collected Western Literature* could be one hundred novels, five hundred short stories, three hundred plays, and fifty essays; this should take about five years, after which the second instalment might be chosen. When the translations have been turned into a manuscript these scholars should examine them, and equip each with an introduction and a biography before they go to the press. The second-rank and below, such as the rank of [Rider] Haggard [1856-1925], should absolutely never be touched. Poetry is not easy to translate and will have to be postponed. (Hu S. 1970b: 359)

Hu Shi thus essentially proposes a vision of a *literary world* made up by different national literatures, all realised in tandem with vernacular and nationalist movements, and all containing at least two 'ranks'—where supposedly the 'second-rank and below' constitutes the vast majority of

[9] The four 'great novels' that Hu Shi mentions as models of vernacular Chinese literature on several occasions throughout the essay are: *Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳 [Water margin] attributed to Shi Naian 施耐庵 (c. 1396-1371), *Xiyou Ji* 西遊記 [Journey to the west] by Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (c. 1510-1582), *Rulin Waishi* [The scholars] by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓 (1701-1754), and *Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢 [Dream of red mansions] by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1724-1764).

any given nation's literary production: popular literature, romance fiction, the likes of Rider Haggard, etc.[10] The 'first rank,' on the other hand, is transnational in nature, and is exchanged between individual national literatures through translation and criticism in order to bring these individual 'literary fields' into closer contact with the standard set, at any given point in time, by the centripetal forces of 'world literature.' The 'constructive literary revolution' that Hu Shi eventually helped bring about—often referred to as the 'May Fourth Movement'[11]—was thus as much a nationalist project as it was a literary one; by seeking symbolic capital from what was perceived as a transatlantic pantheon of 'world literature,' he could safely declare that these cosmopolitan aspirations had strictly national interests.

Hu Shi accordingly emerged as one of the early 'international intellectuals' in Republican China: the type of polyglot and cosmopolitan writer who help bring into being the conception of literature as a transnational system made up by differentiated national/linguistic subsystems. Hu Shi was a traveller, of course, and had spent seven years at American universities: he was in this sense implicated in 'bringing the world home' (Huters 2005) in the form of theoretical discourses studied abroad; but indeed the mere fact that he *had been* abroad was perhaps not inconsequential as a marker of symbolic capital either. It is significant that virtually all the central figures in and around the New Culture Movement had spent time abroad—often in the United States or Europe, but even more frequently in Japan—and invested this distinguishing trait as a specific form of capital in their writings. It might be overstating the matter to call these journeys '*rites de passage*'—echoing Victor Turner (1969: 93-111)—however, it seems reasonable to argue that travel, in itself, had a symbolic significance to the accumulation of literary capital in the early Republican era and that the journeys made by these intellectuals had a specific 'meaning-making' significance. Influential intellectuals before Hu Shi had followed similar routes: notably figures in the late Qing (1644-1911) Wuxu Reform movement (戊戌變法), such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927),[12] where the former in particular had expressed a strong interest in the relationship

[10] Until this point, Haggard had been one of the most popular European writers in China thanks to early translations by Lin Shu 林紓 (1852-1924) and his works had frequently appeared in *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*.

[11] The fact that the 'May Fourth movement'—essentially a nationalist movement staged to protest the unfavourable outcome of the Versailles Treaty in 1919—is used as a moniker to represent not only a literary movement but also the writing attributed to this movement ('May Fourth literature') clearly bespeaks the inseparable nature of *nation* and *narration* in the early twentieth century—a nature that was re-invoked by Mao's literary policies after 1949.

[12] Unlike Hu, however, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao initially travelled more of necessity than academic curiosity. They both fled to Japan in 1898, after falling into disfavour with the Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧太后 (1835-1908),

between literature and politics in his essay from 1902, 'Lun Xiaoshuo yu Qunzhi zhi Guanxi.' The editor-in-chief who had invited Hu's polemical essays into *Xin Qingnian*, Chen Duxiu, had spent half a dozen years in Japan before he returned and founded the journal; and the greatest figure of them all, Lu Xun, who was to publish the (according to conventional wisdom) 'first work' of modern Chinese fiction in the pages of *Xin Qingnian* only a month after Hu Shi's call for 'constructive literary revolution' (May 1918), had similarly trodden his first steps to canonical greatness on Japanese soil.

It was naturally not the expressed cosmopolitanism alone that consecrated these figures as central actors in the nascent Chinese literary field. First of all they were at least bilingual (but often multilingual) and were able to consciously mobilise this skill—through translations, introductions, biographies, histories, etc.—to position themselves as indispensible 'cultural brokers' in their own vision of a national literature; and in the course of this very process, sanction the status of the 'first rank' of world literature and its direct value to China. Furthermore, as the case of Hu Shi demonstrates, these polyglot cosmopolitans were able to capitalise relatively quickly on these proprieties and usurp powerful positions in the cultural bureaucracy (which was still under reconstruction after the break with the imperial system) so that soon they were able to not only suggest ambitious translation projects but to commission them as well. Their implication in the bourgeoning publishing industry is similarly essential to their consecration in the canon of modern Chinese literary history—particularly through the founding and editing of journals that were at once engaged in literature and broader issues of 'public enlightenment.' But in the final analysis, an 'international sensibility' permeates all these strategies: not only in the sense of paying heed to 'global' political events in their writings, but also in the sense of an expressed awareness of literature as a 'world system,' which—although Hu Shi was not quite able to separate it from politics—could at least be described by its own vocabulary, and according to a developmental model specific to the world of writing.

Gradual consolidation of the Republican literary field

An initial split of the Chinese literary field into autonomous and heteronomous forces might be detected in the disagreement between Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu over the general direction of *Xin*

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and travelled from this base extensively to other places in the word—for instance Canada, where they established the Protect the Emperor Society (保皇會) in 1899, and the United States.

Qingnian in the early 1920s. As Chen Pingyuan has described, the editorship of the journal had by the late 1910s developed into a *collective effort* by writers variously affiliated with Beijing University—where Chen Duxiu had been Dean of the Faculty of Humanities since 1917—and the journal was able to appear as 'a cultural unit with a clear political standpoint' without engaging directly in party politics (Chen P. 2011: 77). However, after Chen Duxiu left Beijing University and moved the editorial department back to Shanghai in 1920 and subsequently to Guangzhou, it gradually came to focus far more on the dissemination of a specific political doctrine (Marxism) than, as had previously been the case, open intellectual dialogue spread out over a number of fields, and dedicated broadly to 'revolution in thought' and 'literary revolution'—which naturally did not exclude aspects of political science. After the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, where Chen assumed the inaugural chairmanship, the journal evolved into an actual mouthpiece for Party propaganda and finally broke irrevocably with its inheritance of political independence (Chen P. 2011: 78).

Hu Shi apparently disagreed with this direction, and maintained that *Xin Qingnian* should remain politically independent and return to Beijing, where it might enjoy a higher degree of intellectual autonomy due to its affiliation with the university. As Chen Pingyuan points out, 'it was the divergence between Chen Duxiu's nature as a "staunch revolutionary" and Hu Shi's tendency to solve problems in terms of thought and culture that was the origin of their eventual split' (Chen P 2011: 87). Nevertheless, the split suggests an early polarisation of the literary field and underscores the fundamentally different priorities in Hu's and Chen's literary sensibilities: the measured distance from direct involvement in politics and the matters of state.

The measure of consolidation of a national literary field, according to both Bourdieu and Casanova, is the emergence of an 'avant-garde:' this is the point when certain actors in the literary establishment relinquish subservience to the state, market, or other heteronomous elements, and forward demands for writing to be judged according to characteristics idiosyncratic to literature with authority based upon the specific forms of *capital* that structure the field. 'Formal preoccupations, which is to say specifically literary concerns,' Casanova reminds us, 'appear in small literatures only in a second phase, when an initial stock of literary resources has been accumulated and the first international artists find themselves in a position to challenge the aesthetic assumptions associated with realism and to exploit the revolutionary advances achieved at the Greenwich meridian' (Casanova 2004: 200). The specific function of *realism* in this scheme must be addressed first of all: almost invariably, literary realism arises at an early point in literary

modernity as a 'liberating' discourse, only to be singled out as the primary focus of criticism by 'modernist' movements later on.[13] In China this was no exception, although the interval between the initial victory of realism over classical forms to the 'second phase'—the emergence of a modernist camp with any real influence in the field—was obstructed by the War of Resistance (1937-1945), the Civil War (1945-1949), the totalitarian politicisation of the entire field of cultural production in the first three decades of Communist rule (1949-1978), as well as subsequent political campaigns designed to destroy, at the grassroots-level, any possibility for artistic autonomy.

It is clear that the hegemony of the 'critical realism' (批判現實主義) espoused by the May Fourth generation loomed large over Chinese literary space throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, and that its derivative, 'revolutionary realism' (革命現實主義), soon won widespread support among left-wing writers and strengthened the heteronomous (i.e. heavily political) fraction of the field initially championed by Chen Duxiu. Up until the full-blown outbreak of armed conflict on the mainland, however, Chinese literary space was steadily accumulating resources and 'international' writers were starting to voice ideas about the necessity of distancing literary production from involvement in the nationalist cause and ally it instead with the 'revolutionary advances achieved at the Greenwich meridian.' The journal *Xiandai* 現代 [Modern times], edited by Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003)[14] and subtitled, again in French, '*Les Contemporains*,' was a leading factor in the arrested development of an autonomous faction of the field in the early 1930s. As Leo Ou-fan Lee has written, Shi was appointed the editorship on grounds that he had 'no pronounced ideological sympathies' (Lee 1999: 131), which initially had the practical implication of rendering the publication less liable for KMT prosecution by renouncing affiliation with the leftist fractions of the field. However, there were clearly also other factors at work.

In the very brief 'inaugural manifesto' (創刊宣言) at the beginning of the first issue (May 1932), Shi emphasises that *Xiandai* is not 'a collective journal' (同人雜誌) in the narrow sense of

[13] Theodore Huters has defined two reasons for the central position of realism at the time of the May Fourth movement. On the one hand, 'realism was discovered to lie near the top of a Western evolutionary scheme of the progression of genres,' and thus 'the natural successor to classicism and romanticism' and 'a token of faith that Chinese literature was moving forward along the universal path pioneered by Western literary practice.' On the other hand, 'the appeal of realism was its identification with movements for social reform that had characterised nineteenth century Europe. In a China desperately seeking ways to elevate itself out of social and political backwardness, the literary form most identified with reform movements in the West was hard to resist. That Japan had earlier introduced literary realism and had gone on to prosper as a modern state added significantly to realism's appeal' (Huters 1993: 153-154).

[14] Shi edited the first three volumes (1932-1934) by himself, after which he was joined by Du Heng 杜衡 (1907-1964). Later they both had to renounce editorship; see Lee 1999 (130-150) for details on the development and decline of the journal.

the term, and thus 'has no intentions of generating anything in the likes of literary currents, isms, or political factions' (Shi 1932b: 2). The attack is obviously directed at the type of group-run journals that had slowly evolved into—or been from the very outset—organs in the service of a political line rather than 'the intrinsic value' of literary works (ibid). The target might easily have been *Xin Qingnian* (as mentioned above) or indeed *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*, which had folded earlier in 1932.[15] While this is clearly a claim for literary autonomy, it is also clear that, by the early 1930s, the denouncement of previous or contemporary journals, writers, movements, and the like was already common practice among emerging writers and literary alliances of any sort: in order to move into a new position in the field, one had to do so through the repudiation of other, established, positions.

In the 'editorial' (編輯座談) at the back of the same issue, Shi Zhecun clarifies his position, and the position of the journal as opposed to former Chinese literary journals, which he generally finds 'unsatisfying.' He considers these as falling mainly into two categories:

> 我覺得牠們不是態度太趨於極端，便是趣味太低級。前者的弊病是容易把雜誌的對於讀者的地位，從伴侶升到師傅。雜誌的編者往往容易拘於自己的一種狹隘的文藝觀，而無意之間把雜誌的氣分表現得很莊嚴，於是他們讀者便祇是他們得學生了；後者的弊病，足以使新文學本身日趨於崩潰的命運，只要一看現在禮拜六派勢力之復活，就可以知道了。
> I think that either the attitude is too extreme [in these journals] or the standard too lowbrow. The drawback of the former is an inclination to speak down to its reader, so that it poses as a teacher rather than a companion. The editors are often compromised by their own parochial artistic outlook and unwittingly make the journals appear in a very dignified ambience—thus rendering their readers little more than students. The drawbacks of the latter are enough to lead New Literature itself down a path of steady decline—you only have to take a look at the current revival of influence by the Libailiu [Saturday] group[16] to realise that. (Shi 1932a: 197)

In carving out a space for himself and the journal, Shi defines the two main enemies: *political literature*, that sets out to instruct rather than enlighten, and *commercial literature*, that has the power to consume other literary forms by appealing to 'popular' sentiments. Although a touch of bitterness towards the end of the passage might betray his sympathies—or is perhaps merely added to cover up the already tacit denunciation of politicised writing—it is fairly obvious that Shi is

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[15] *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* had since the usurpation of the editorship in 1920 by Mao Dun made a decisive turn to the political left, and functioned as the primary medium for the brand of critical realism associated with the May Fourth group. Leo Lee suggests that the founding of *Xiandai* was directly related to the Japanese bombing of The Commercial Press and ensuing discontinuation of the leading factor in the market for literary journals, *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*. See: Lee 1999: 130.

[16] The Libailiu group founded the weekly *Libailiu* in 1914, which is considered the 'most famous and most successful fiction journal of the entire Republican period' (Chang and Owen 2010: 551). The variety of contesters for the hegemony over the discourse of New Literature, on the other hand, who were all in mutual disagreement, appeared to agree on the low literary quality of the journal and the writings associated with the group, and did not miss an opportunity to point this out.

struggling for a position of relative autonomy from both economic and political principles in literature. The authority of his criticism, moreover, is founded in the contention that *Xiandai*, as opposed to these other journals, is in sync with world literary time. Whereas metaphors of 'youth' and 'novelty' had prevailed in the literary field since the turn of the century (*New Youth* combining both), *Xiandai* considered itself a 'contemporary' of world literature: 'since the name of this monthly is *Xiandai*, I also intend to do my utmost to make it worthy of that name in the area of introducing foreign literature' (ibid: 198). In order to be 'modern' or 'contemporary,' a keen knowledge of 'foreign' (not necessarily 'western') literature was naturally essential, and the journal proceeded to dedicate a considerable number of its pages, not to *catching up* with 'western literature,' but to *keeping up to date* with contemporary literary currents and avant-gardes around the world. Leo Lee seconds this observation, when he writes of the French subtitle, '*Les Contemporains*,' that 'it inscribes a collective self-image of Shi's group as people who saw themselves as "moderns" […] and who also claimed to be "contemporaries" of world literature—men who were abreast of the most recent, hence fashionable, literary movements everywhere' (Lee 1999: 136-137). Although Lee goes on to suggest a certain amount of 'posturing' in Shi Zhecun's statements, in addition to the sentiments of the writers around *Xiandai* that they apparently accounted for,[17] it is clear that certain writers who considered themselves the 'vanguard' of the literary field in the early 1930s were already conscious of the heteronomuos forces that encroach

[17] Lee's main objection is to the term 'modernism' in relation to the *Xiandai* group. With reference to Matei Calinescu's *Faces of Modernity* (1977), he goes on to describe European modernity emerging by the mid-nineteenth century as 'split' into the opposing forces of a 'material' or 'historical modernity' (fused by the industrial revolution, capitalism, etc.), which was generally associated with the bourgeoisie, and an 'aesthetic modernity,' which had as its central principle the rejection of 'bourgeois modernity.' Lee rightly points out, that this was not the case with 'modernism' in China in the 1920s and early 1930s—lacking most obviously the form of 'aesthetic hostility' towards the bourgeoisie found in various European modernisms. 'In their pursuit of a modern mode of consciousness and modern forms of literature,' writes Lee, 'Chinese writers did not choose—nor did they feel the need—to separate the two domains of historical and aesthetic modernity. There were no tangible masses of the bourgeoisie to shock […] Unlike European modernists, they were yet to comprehend the full impact of the industrial revolution—and for that matter a full-fledged "high capitalism"—even in Shanghai. In other words, modernity may have become a literary fashion, an ideal, but it was not a fully verifiable objective reality' (Lee 1999: 147). Although it is unclear what constitutes 'fully verifiable objective reality' in the realm of art and literature, Lee is right to point out that the experience of industrialisation and 'modernity' was different in China than in many European countries at the time, and that the aesthetic engagement with these processes thus also achieved, if not different *forms*, then different *implications*. The use of Calinescu's model, however, constitutes an unnecessary obstacle to the analysis of Chinese literary space in the early 1930s in the present context by making it comparable to a loosely defined 'European modernity' and relegating its aesthetic advances to a matter of 'fashion'—since 'they were yet to comprehend the full impact of the industrial revolution.' Even though the term 'modernism' (現代主義) was used, and has since then *been* used, to describe a variety of the writings associated with *Xiandai*, the concepts of 'relative autonomy' or, as Casanova has it, 'international propriety'—although (as has been shown) also not unproblematic—have been chosen for the present purposes.

upon the autonomy of art and were reaching out to world literary space for symbolic capital to sustain this position.

This was in no way an unproblematic position, however, in light of the fact that both leftist and rightist critics viewed political neutrality in literature with increasing suspicion as tensions arose on the political and military fronts. Although a rich variety of literary schools and paradigms had arisen in the fifteen years since Hu Shi's initial call for a 'constructive literary revolution' the discourse of New Literature had by the early 1930s consolidated into two main and seemingly contradictory factions that purported to regard literature in terms of either *nation* or of *class*. Although the former group often gets associated with Hu Shi, it in fact reached farther back to the Wuxu Reformers of the late Qing, insofar as it was a more deliberate and politicised program designed to strengthen 'the nation' rather than a 'national literature;' but more paramount at the time, however, might have been the need to formulate a coherent politicised ideology of art that counterweighed the rapidly growing influence of the leftist faction of the field (Chang and Owen 2010: 498).

Politicisation and the scramble for positions in the 1930s

The main reason for the growing power of the literary left had been the organisation of the League of Leftwing Writers (中國左翼作家聯盟) in Shanghai in 1930, spearheaded by Lu Xun and affiliated directly with the CCP. (This no doubt also accounts for the reputation of the other 'group' as KMT-sponsored, rightist, and fascist.) As Wang-chi Wong has argued, the political coup by the KMT in 1927 and subsequent purge of Communists from the United Front and launch of the White Terror had a direct impact on the literary field: now that the CCP had been ousted from the political process, it 'took refuge in literature […], and within a few years, leftwing literature became the dominant element in the literary arena' (Wong, W. 1991: 6). Although Marxism had been prevalent in the field since the early years of *Xin Qingnian*, the League advocated a radical instrumentalisation of literature in the class struggle—which rendered the only possible *de facto* positions available in the literary field as 'for' or 'against' the proletarian revolution. Their manifesto, or 'program,' passed at the inaugural meeting was a clear expression of art's subjugation to politics and can in this sense be seen as an early trace of the Communist literary system to emerge after 1949: 'They [poets and artists] have no choice but to stand on the front line of history and take up the cause of literary struggle for the progress of human society and the wiping out of

conservative forces' (quoted in Wong, W. 1991: 88). Although there was probably never complete unanimity among the various internal factions of the League, it is clear that their utilitarian brand of literature and politicised readings exerted significant influence upon the entire literary field—despite the ban placed on the organisation by the government in 1930, forcing it to take its activities underground.

Radical Marxist-Leninist readings of literature had begun to sprout long before the formal organisation of the League. As early as 1923, Yu Dafu 郁達夫 (1896-1945) had launched a rhetorical attack on 'Romantics old and new,' in the essay 'Wenxue shang de Jieji Douzheng' 文學上的階級鬥爭 [Class struggle in literature], targeting writers lacking 'the power to wage a victorious struggle over the evils of society,' and 'driven to despair by the realisation that their ideals have no place in real society, must escape into the Republic of Art' (藝術的共和國) (Yu 1982: 134-135; tr. Haili Kong and Howard Goldblatt, Yu 1996: 263-264). Criticism of this type intensified towards the end of the 1920s, broadening the ranks of leftwing critics along with the scope of available targets, while at the same time narrowing significantly the criteria for successfully applying the appropriate 'class consciousness' in a work. In 1928 Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897-1984)—who, like Yu Dafu, was one of the central members in the influential Creation Society (創造社)[18]—picked up on the criticism of aloof writers who would rather 'escape into the Republic of Art' than face 'real' socio-political issues. In the essay 'Cong Wenxue Geming dao Geming Wenxue' 從文學革命到革命文學 [From a literary revolution to a revolutionary literature], Cheng named both Hu Shi and Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) as responsible for the deterioration of the literary revolution: the former, on account that he and the New Culture movement, 'having yelled out just a few shouts, fled back to their old nest as if they had exerted themselves to a state of exhaustion' (Cheng 1987: 36; tr. Michael Gotz, Cheng 1996: 271), and the latter, on account that he and the writers centred around the journal *Yusi* 語絲 [Spinner of words][19]

[18] Earlier in the 1920s, the Creation Society had in fact been associated with a relatively liberal approach to literature and notions of 'art for art's sake,' but had, along with the rest of the field, been progressively radicalised towards the end of the 1920s. Michel Hockx writes of the 'strategy adopted by the Creation Society upon entering the literary field' in 1921, that '[i]n a typical avant-garde manner, the Creationists emphatically espoused what Bourdieu would call the field's "autonomous principle" (literary value, literary excellence, pure literature). At the same time, they accused the literary establishment, in passionate and aggressive language, of having surrendered to the "heteronomous principle" (financial gain, status, power politics)' (Hockx 2003: 68-69; see also Tang and Hockx 2008).

[19] The Yusi Society was founded in 1924 and included prominent writers such as Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun and Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) (see Miller 2008).

'represent[ed] the leisured capitalist class and the petite bourgeoisie who are "sleeping inside the drum"' (ibid: 38; 273-274).

Contrary to the emerging ideas about literary autonomy, Cheng points out that literature, 'in the total organisation of society, constitutes one part of the superstructure. We cannot comprehend each individual part when separated from the whole; we must take up the entire social structure to investigate the part that is literature. Only then can we acquire a true understanding' (ibid: 39; 274). 'If we still would bear the responsibility of revolutionary intelligentsia,' Cheng concludes, 'we must endeavour to acquire class consciousness, we must make our medium approach the spoken language of the worker and peasant masses, we must take the worker-peasant masses as our target,' in order to make the step 'from a Literary Revolution to a Revolutionary Literature' (ibid: 39; 274-275). These statements in fact already anticipated the cornerstones in Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 (1893-1976) canonised 'Yan'an Talks,' that were to appear in print in 1943[20] and came to guide the development of the Communist literary system after 1949—namely the instrumentalisation of art on the political frontline, and the organisation of writers and artists into a 'cultural army' (文化的軍隊), which was deemed indispensible by Mao in the project of 'uniting our own ranks and defeating the enemy' (團結自己、戰勝敵人) (Mao 1971: 804).

In the early 1930s, the young and inexperienced critic Hu Qiuyuan 胡秋原 (1910-2004) sparked the debate that eventually was to play out in the pages of *Xiandai* with a couple of essays in the journal *Wenhua Pinglun* 文化評論 [Cultural critique], which pleaded for literary autonomy in the midst of the increasing politicisation advocated by more powerful forces in the field. In 'Agou Wenyi Lun' 阿狗文藝論 [On the literature of the dog], published in December 1931, he stated his initial position:

> 藝術雖然不是「至上」，然而絕不是「至下」的東西。將藝術墮落到一種政治的留聲機，那是藝術的叛徒。藝術家雖然不是神聖，然而也絕不是叭兒狗。以不三不四的理論，來強姦文學，是對於藝術尊嚴不可怒的冒瀆。
> Although art is not the 'highest of things' it is certainly not the 'basest of things.' Those who let art degenerate into a gramophone for politics[21] are the traitors of art. Although artists are not sacred

[20] The talks themselves (Mao's opening and concluding remarks at the Yan'an Symposium on Literature and Art) took place in 1942 on 2 and 23 May, respectively.
[21] This was most likely a reference to the article 'Liushengjiqi de Huiyin: Yishu Qingnian Yingqu de Taidu de Kaocha' 留聲機器的回音：藝術青年應取的態度的考察 [Echoes from the gramophone: an investigation of the appropriate attitude of young people in the arts], published by Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) under the name Mai Keang 麥克昂 in 1928.

> beings, they are certainly not lapdogs either. The rape of literature by random theoretical doctrines is an offense that cannot upset the dignity of art. (Hu Q. 1987a: 503)

Four months later (April 1932), after a few rebuttals by League-affiliated critics, he clarified his standpoint in the same journal; emphasising in 'Wu Qinlüe Wenyi' 勿侵略文藝 [Do not encroach upon literature and art] that he had devalued neither 'nationalist' (民族) nor 'proletarian' (普羅) literature in the previous essay, but that he—as a 'liberal' or 'free man' (自由人)—could not accept the practice of 'allowing only certain types of art to exist while expelling others' (Hu Q. 1987b: 505).

Writing under the pseudonym Su Wen 蘇汶, Du Heng[22] entered the polemics in the July 1932 issue of *Xiandai*, with a piece entitled 'Guanyu *Wenxin* yu Hu Qiuyuan de Wenyi Lunbian' 關於「文新」與胡秋原的文藝論辯 [Regarding the *Literary News* and Hu Qiuyuan's Literary Arguments], in which he took issue with Hu Qiuyuan on various accounts (particularly his clumsy deployment of Marxist theory) but ended up, in the final analysis, more or less assuming a similar stance in opposition to political dogma in literature and art—whether these were framed in narratives of nation or of class. In line with Shi Zhecun's 'Inaugural Manifesto,' Su Wen's text expressed a desire to distance literature from 'ideological currents, isms, or political fractions;' and while he acknowledged the complications of a politically neutral stance under the present conditions, he proposed the possibility of a 'third position' that was distanced both from the nationalist 'right' and the proletarian left but did not necessarily contradict or negate either of the opposed factions: 'At a time when "free intellectuals" [知識階級的自由人] and "bound, Party-affiliated" [不自由的，有黨派的] intellectuals vie for domination on the literary scene, the most difficult stance is that of the third type of writer [第三種人]. Yet this third type constitutes the great flock of writers' (Su 1932b: 384; tr. Jane Parish Yang, Su 1996: 373).

However, as Cheng Fangwu had already warned in his 1928 essay: 'No one is allowed to stand in the middle. You must come to this side, or go over there!' (Cheng 1987: 40; 1996: 275). In the class-based view of literature there existed only two positions: *for* or *against* the revolution. The argument that literature might detach itself from the superstructure and form its own autonomous

[22] Du Heng was in fact also a pseudonym (albeit one more frequently) used by Dai Kechong 戴克崇 (1907-1964), who, like several of his peers, shifted freely between different literary aliases (see Chen Y. 1996: 259). Apparently the 'Su Wen' moniker was assumed for essayistic work, while 'Du Heng' was reserved for fictional production (Macdonald 2002: 294 n. 1).

'republic of art' was simply preposterous to leftwing critics; and in the eyes of the opposing so-called 'rightwing' faction—that had assumed 'nationalism' (one of the Three Principles of the People[23] and partly inherited from the New Culture Movement) as their prism of literary criticism—this type of aesthetic separatism naturally entered the territory of national treachery and was equally unacceptable.

In July 1932, Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935), who had recently been ousted from the Politburo of the CCP but assumed a position as '*de facto* leader' of the League of Leftwing Writers by the early 1930s (Wong, W. 1991: 108-110), entered the polemical battle. Also assuming a pseudonym (Yi Jia 易嘉), Qu began the essay 'Wenyi de Ziyou he Wenxuejia de bu Ziyou' 文藝的自由和文學家的不自由 [Freedom for Literature but not the Writer], published in *Xiandai*, Vol. 1, No. 6, with a quote from Lenin's 'Party Organisation and Party Literature:'

> The freedom of the bourgeois writer, artist or actress[24] is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the money-bag, on corruption, on prostitution.
>
> And we socialists expose this hypocrisy and rip off the false labels, not in order to arrive at a non-class literature and art (that will be possible only in a socialist extra-class society), but to contrast this hypocritically free literature, which is in reality linked to the bourgeoisie, with a really free one that will be *openly* linked to the proletariat. (Lenin 1965: 48, tr. Andrew Rothstein)

Having set this epigraph of extraordinary symbolic violence, Qu Qiubai takes out his targets one by one, pointing to Hu Qiuyuan (upon whom he, like other critics, heaps a considerable amount of ridicule) and retorts that literature is 'at all times and at all places a "gramophone" for politics' (Yi 1932: 789), and addressed to Su Wen:

> 每一個文學家，不論他們有意的，無意的，不論他是在動筆，或者是沉默着，他始終是某一階級的意識形態的代表。在這天羅地網的階級社會裡，你逃不到什麼地方去，也就做不成什麼「第三種人」。
>
> Every single writer of literature—*whether or not they are aware of it themselves, and whether he is writing actively or staying silent*—is at all times a representative of the ideology of a certain class. There is no place to escape to in this all-encompassing class society, and it is impossible to create some kind of 'third category.' (Yi 1932: 791, his emphasis)

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[23] The 'Three Principles of the People' (三民主義) was a policy devised by Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866-1925) that, besides 'nationalism' (民族主義), promoted 'democracy' (民權主義) and the somewhat more vaguely defined 'people's livelihood' (民生主義).

[24] Qu tacitly omits the gendering of the 'actress' as it appears in the Russian and later Chinese editions; he was fluent in Russian and had spent several years stationed in Moscow, which makes it feasible to assume that he had translated the passage by himself.

Since he was part of the inner circle around *Xiandai*, Du Heng was apparently able to screen Qu Qiubai's essay and retort in the same issue (and even place his own effort before Qu's). Du's essay '"Disan zhong Ren" de Chulu' 「第三種人」的出路 [The way out for the 'third category'] was at once a response to Qu Qiubai's attack (whom he presumably did not know the true identity of) and a lengthy argument against what he saw as the dogmatic and condescending bullying by 'guiding theorists of the left' (左翼指導理論家). Du frames his own essay in a Marxist discourse, but it is even clearer from the frequent reference to the 'fear' of writers to fail to live up to the increasingly strict requirements set for 'revolutionary literature,' that the radical Marxist-Leninist fraction, epitomised from 1930 to 1936 by the League of Leftwing Writers, already exercised a considerable amount of influence in the field and appeared to constitute the predominant factor in the critical direction of New Literature—despite the fact that their direct opponents were supposedly sponsored by (or ideologically affiliated with) the incumbent KMT government.

In the essay, Du Heng (as Su Wen) points out that his use of the term 'third category' had been purely accidental, and that he 'had not anticipated that Mr. Yi Jia would compose an entire essay' based on this random remark and so vigorously insist on the impossibility of a 'third category' of writers and artists in a class-based society (Su 1932a: 776). 'According to my current conviction,' Su Wen proceeds, 'this "third category" is not necessarily impossible and in fact already exists. It is only from the narrow theoretical perspective of class literature that this "third category" is rendered impossible' (ibid). The 'narrow' literary outlook expressed by Mr. Yi Jia, but characteristic of the whole army of the 'guiding theorists of the left,' appeared to suggest that 'the only way out' for the 'third category' of writers and artists was to 'sell themselves for beauty' (ibid: 777). This was according to Su Wen *too* narrow: 'The only way out for the "third category" is surely not to sell themselves for beauty, but, rather than deception or imitation, they should strive instead to create works that belong to the future (since they are unwanted at the *present*)!' (778, his emphasis). What is most striking in this passage is obviously the reference to (and faith in) the 'future' state of Chinese literary space. The statement betrays a keen attention to the transnational paradigm of the development of literatures (as had been established practice on the literary vanguard since Hu Shi), as well as regret over the fact that the present state of the field did not allow space for apolitical literature anywhere between the consolidated political factions—and hence inhibited serious discussion of autonomous principles in writing. The conceptualisations of the autonomy of art laid out by Su Wen and Hu Qiuyuan in this sense preconceived the structural requirements for their implementation: while the ideas were there, the field had accumulated little

autonomy in the fifteen years since the launch of the 'constructive literary revolution' by the *Xin Qingnian* camp. Sean Macdonald has pointed out that it is necessary in this regard to distinguish between 'autonomy as a *concept* and as an *institution*' (Macdonald 2002: 300, his emphasis), but that 'as a concept, autonomy is also an indication of institutional realities:' 'intellectuals in 1930s China may be distinguished as part of an "emerging 'class' of modern professionals" […]. But as an assertion of autonomy, the "third type of person" remains fundamentally heuristic. In the end, Su Wen's autonomous gesture is socially responsible and literature is viewed as an agent of social reform' (Ibid: 315). The 'future,' or at least the immediate future, did not appear much more susceptible to ideas of a 'third category' or 'free man' either; if anything, the politicised discourse of literature intensified up through the 1930s as the national crisis progressed. Soon the political ideologues of the CCP, such as Zhou Yang, were publishing regularly in the pages of *Xiandai*,[25] and after the November 1934 issue, Shi Zhecun and Du Heng resigned from their posts and were replaced by editors most likely appointed by the KMT (Lee 1999: 149).

While the CCP and KMT had been busy battling each other (on both ideological and military fronts), Japan had steadily advanced and, after taking Manchuria in 1931, it was only a matter of time before the rest of the territory was under siege by the Imperial Army. The implications on the highly volatile literary field were naturally immense. As mentioned above, the bombing of Shanghai in 1932 had already inflicted considerable material damage by destroying the printing facilities of the Commercial Press, and thereby forcing a range of its publications (among them *Xiaoshuo Yuebao*) to discontinue their activities. The looming invasion might also have made politicised writing seem more appealing to writers who would otherwise have tended towards the 'third category,' and for a while dissolved the internal boundaries between the various politicised factions of the field. In 1936 Zhou Yang disbanded the League of Leftwing Writers and called for a temporary unification of class-based and nationalist literature in a 'united front' of 'national defence literature' to meet the current predicament of impending colonisation. This new literary direction, coined by the former ideologues of the League, was intended to summon 'all writers, regardless of their social stratum or faction, to take their stand on the united national front and to join their efforts to create literary works relevant to national revolution. The theme of national defence should

[25] Zhou's famous essay 'Guanyu Shehuizhuyi de Xianshizhuyi yu Geming de Langmanzhuyi' 关于社会主义的现实主义与革命的浪漫主义 [Regarding socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism] was published in the November 1933 issue.

become the priority for all authors, other than traitors' (Zhou Y. 1987: 718; tr. Richard King, Zhou Y. 1996: 413). The organisation in March 1938 of the All-China Association of Literary Resistance (中華全國文藝界抗敵協會)—which appointed Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966) as nominal head and managed to gather 'virtually all authors of all persuasions' under its auspices (Chang and Owen: 553)—was a step further in the consolidation of internal political disputes, but also a further blow to autonomous principles of writing. As conditions deteriorated towards the end of the 1930s and political leaders gradually monopolised the discourse of 'national Chinese literature,' discussions of autonomous principles in writing—whether framed by the 'third category' or otherwise—were slowly laid to rest, and not to surface again on the mainland until the 1980s.

It might be assumed from the overview in this chapter that the 'imagination' of a modern and national Chinese literature in the first three decades of the twentieth century displays the symptoms of developing literary spaces on the periphery of world literary space described by Casanova. While the constant comparison between China and 'the west' permeated disparate areas of public and intellectual discourse, and obviously literature as well, there were clearly also more nuanced or transnational interpretations by writers and critics such as both Hu Shi and Shi Zhecun—despite the fact that they might not see eye to eye in all aspects of the matter. The vision of an international literary space seems evident to both, although they diverge in terms of the constitution of national space inside the international. The political radicalisation of the field from the late 1920s onwards, moreover, suggests an early trace of the literary vision that were to guide cultural policies in the PRC right up to the present day. In this light, the 'third category' or 'third type of person' discussion in the early 1930s might be seen as representative of the autonomous principles that were to characterise the counter-system after 1949—and particularly from the late 1980s onwards. When war broke out on the mainland in 1937 it provided the material conditions for the decentralisation of Chinese literary space and initiated a process of both territorial and imaginary displacements.

Chapter Three

Early Transgressions: Systemic Division between National and International Principles

Having witnessed the dissolution of the League of Leftwing Writers and the launch of a 'united front' of all-out utilitarian writing to promote popular resistance to imperialism, Lu Xun's death in October 1936 seemed to mark the end of an era of measured accumulation of literary autonomy on the Chinese mainland. The ensuing period of diffusion and fragmentation did not pertain to the conceptual aspect of literary autonomy alone, but had specific implications on the material and structural conditions of the field as a whole. Although the foreign concessions in Shanghai—the city that had served as the nervous centre of the Republican literary field—initially provided a sanctuary for production and publishing, it is clear that many of the central institutions of distribution and dissemination were heavily disabled when the city fell in the autumn of 1937. The exodus from this cultural nexus was significant, and although some stayed behind to cultivate a literary scene of 'politically innocuous' writing (Chang and Owen 2010: 553) it is clear that many of the central figures had vanished. The spatial decentralisation that ensued generated a series of new literary centres of production and publishing, some that were temporary and some that were to fuse with other spaces and generate new temporalities and identities of their own—notably in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Decentralising the field: literary exodus and the Sino-Japanese War

The Sino-Japanese War—or War of Resistance (抗日戰爭)—between 1937 and 1945 and the ensuing chaos and civil war naturally had immense implications on the literary field as a whole, as well as on the very conceptualisation of what was to constitute a 'national literature' for China. Edward Gunn sees the period not as 'decisive' but as 'pivotal:' 'The artistic and literary community took major steps toward a modern aesthetic, guided by models and ideas regarded as international or cosmopolitan. At the same, however, this community lost any serious hopes for a social autonomy by which it could inform the politics of the nation, rather than be guided by government' (Gunn 1992: 235). This 'pivotal' period also generated a series of new literary spaces and a mass exodus of writers from the northeast to the interior. When the central government fled Nanjing for Chongqing in 1938, several writers (as well as critics, editors, publishers, etc.) followed suit, and established a new literary nucleus in the southwestern municipality. This makeshift organisation of displaced writers and institutions managed to sustain a sense of continuity with the New Literature of the preceding decades; and writers who had already made their name elsewhere, such as Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005) or Lao She, were able to consolidate their position in the field and publish important works in the wartime capital.[1]

Even further south, in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan, another literary centre emerged largely due to the relocation of Peking, Tsinghua, and Nankai University from the northeast in 1938. Significant literary personalities, such as Shi Zhecun, Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902-1988) and Qian Zhongshu, were among the staff recruited or transferred to what came to be known as Southwestern Associated University (西南聯合大學); but Kunming appears to have sported a relatively virulent literary scene during the war years not only as a consequence of necessity: in addition to its proximity to vast mountain ranges and lush rainforests, another attraction of this city upon urban bohemians was an ethnic demography consisting mainly of non-Han peoples and a strategically important location on the trading routes to Inner- and Southeast Asia—making it an 'oddly cosmopolitan city' (Blum 2002: 149) even before the new immigrants arrived from the northeast.

Already before the war, Ai Wu 艾蕪 (1904-1992), who will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, had explored the possibilities of fusing travel writing inspired by trips around Yunnan

[1] Ba Jin for instance published the novels *Chun* 春 [Spring] and *Qiu* 秋 [Autumn], the last two instalments of his *Jiliu Sanbuqu* 激流三部曲 [Torrent trilogy], in Chongqing in 1938 and 1940 respectively.

and present-day Myanmar with the imperatives of New Literature,[2] but other writers—including both Shi Zhecun and Shen Congwen—tried their hands at various forms of travel writing inspired by the region in the 1930s.[3] The consciousness of narrative place and *displacement* among these writers can be seen as an early trace of the form of travel-infused writing that emerged fifty years later, when writers like Ma Yuan, Ma Jian, Gao Xingjian, and Yang Lian started experimenting with a fusion of bodily and textual movement. Although for vastly differently ends, the inscription of 'distance' in the literary narrative, as well as the preoccupation with observation ('vision') and recording of cultural practices of 'Other' ethnic groups on the south-western frontiers, can be seen already in Ai Wu's early writing about Yunnan.

Despite the rise of significant centres of literary production, exchange, and competition in these and other locations (for instance in Guilin) as well as the perseverance of the former centres of Shanghai and Beijing, it was deep in the rugged mountains of Shaanxi that the seeds for the future structure of the national field were sown. The Communist stronghold in Yan'an attracted a large number of sympathising writers—most prominently, perhaps, Ding Ling—and the radical discourse of 'revolutionary literature' promoted by Cheng Fangwu and Qu Qiubai in the early post-may Fourth period and continued by the League of Leftwing Writers was remoulded once again, this time in the hands of Mao Zedong. While their former antagonists—the 'rightists' and the 'third category'—were necessarily physically absent (but naturally always spiritually present, like the Japanese imperialists), writers of the revolutionary left were obliged to turn their critical eye inwards.

From his headquarters in Yan'an, Mao Zedong quickly established himself as the leading authority on socialist literary theory and initiated a series of programs—or 'campaigns' (運動)—to not only disseminate, but also implement, his thoughts on literature and art. On 1 February 1942, Mao initiated the 'Yan'an Rectification Campaign' (延安整風運動)[4] with a talk that criticised what he saw as 'dangerous' external influences that threatened the internal unity of the Party:

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[2] Ai Wu published 'Nanguo zhi Ye' 南國之夜 [Night in southern lands] in *Xiandai* Vol. 4, No. 3 in 1932, and his first collection of travel-inspired short stories *Nanxing Ji* 南行記 [Travels in the south] the following year.

[3] Jeffrey Kinkley has described literary life in Kunming during the Sino-Japanese War as representing 'the very best and worst of times' for the relocated writers and intellectuals. While poverty appears to have been a general concern to these writers, Kunming afforded a sort of 'spiritual' stimuli: 'a nearly self-sufficient and independent community of scholars and writers, free from political interference from either the Nationalists or the Communists, because the province was ruled by a warlord only nominally allied with the Nationalists. Everyone was equal, and everyone was free to ask ultimate questions' (Kinkley in Shen C. 1995: 381).

[4] A campaign running until 1944, with the purpose of 'correcting' the bad social influences inherited from a petit bourgeois class background.

'subjectivism' (主觀主義), 'sectarianism' (宗派主義), and what he called 'stereotyped Party writing' (黨八股).[5] A week later, Mao turned his attention more specifically in the direction of writing in the talk 'Fandui Dang Bagu' 反對黨八股 [Oppose stereotyped Party writing]. In this relatively brief talk, Mao criticised what he saw as empty 'formalism' (形式主義) in literature since the May Fourth and in particular the form of 'stereotyped writing' (literally referring to the *baguwen* or 'eight-legged essay'), that did not reflect 'actual circumstances' but relied instead on worn-out slogans and catchphrases. In general Mao applauded what he saw as the 'founding principles' of the May Fourth Movement: its opposition to old dogmas and advocacy of science and democracy; however, the 'formalist approach' that came to 'affect the subsequent course of the movement' (Mao 1971: 789), had also been largely responsible for the 'stereotyped writing' internally in the Party, that was to be purged as part of the Rectification Campaign:

> 五四運動的發展，分成了兩個潮流。一部分人繼承了五四運動的科學和民主的精神，並在馬克斯主意的基礎上加以改造，這就是共產黨人和若干黨外馬克斯主義者所做的工作。另一部份人則走到資產階級的道路上去，是形式主義向右的發展。但在共產黨內也不是一致的，其中也有一部份人發生偏向，馬克思主義沒有拿得穩，犯了形式主義的錯誤，這就是主觀主義，宗派主義和黨八股，這是形式主義向「左」的發展。
> In its development, the May 4th Movement divided into two currents. One section inherited its scientific and democratic spirit and transformed it on the basis of Marxism; this is what the Communists and some non-Party Marxists did. Another section took the road of the bourgeoisie; this was the development of formalism towards the Right. But within the Communist Party too the situation was not uniform; there, too, some members deviated and, lacking a firm grasp of Marxism, committed errors of formalism, namely, the errors of subjectivism, sectarianism and stereotyped Party writing. This was the development of formalism towards the 'Left.' (ibid; Mao 1967: 55)

Despite the fact that Mao's rhetorical attack was immediately directed at the offhand misappropriation of revolutionary jargon, which had apparently already come to dominate Party discourse, it is clear that on a deeper level the idea of 'formalism' was tied directly to issues of literary autonomy. The idea of writing that was self-reflexive, or somehow sought its ideals in the semi-autonomous structure of the World Republic of Letters, ran directly contrary to the Party's programme and had to be shut down and sealed off in order to move ahead. In May the same year, at the Symposium on Literature and Art—which came to constitute a watershed in the development

[5] David Apter and Tony Saich point out that Mao's criticism was directed mainly at two groups in Yan'an: 'first, the intellectuals, who had recently come to Yan'an and lacked practical revolutionary experience; and second, and initially more important, Wang Ming [王明 (1904-1974)] and the Russian Returned Students. […] The Party under Mao would provide the direction for the revolution, and the role of its intellectuals would not be to examine it critically but to proselytize it faithfully' (Apter and Saich 1994: 280).

of the Communist literary system after 1949—Mao refined his position on 'formalism' and its links to concepts of literary autonomy. The published documents of Mao's speeches that opened and closed the symposium made clear that the Party was the central actor in all matters concerning literature and art.

> 有些政治上根本反動的東西，也可能有某種藝術性。內容愈反動的作品而又愈帶藝術性，就愈能毒害人民，就愈應該排斥。處於沒落時期的一切剝削階級的文藝的共同特點，就是其反動的政治內容和其藝術的形式之間所存在的矛盾。我們的要求則是政治和藝術的統一，內容和形式的統一，革命的政治內容和盡可能完美的藝術形式的統一。缺乏藝術性的藝術品，無論政治上怎樣進步，也是沒有力量的。因此，我們既反對政治觀點錯誤的藝術品，也反對只有正確的政治觀點而沒有藝術力量的所謂「標語口號式」的傾向。我們應該進行文藝問題上的兩條戰線鬥爭。
>
> Some works which politically are downright reactionary may have a certain artistic quality. The more reactionary their content and the higher their artistic quality, the more poisonous they are to the people, and the more necessary it is to reject them. A common characteristic of the literature and art of all exploiting classes in their period of decline is the contradiction between their reactionary political content and their artistic form. What we demand is the *unity of politics and art*, the *unity of content and form*, the *unity of revolutionary political content and the highest possible perfection of artistic form*. Works of art which lack artistic quality have no force, however progressive they are politically. Therefore, we oppose both the tendency to produce works of art with a wrong political viewpoint and the tendency towards the 'poster and slogan style' which is correct in political viewpoint but lacking in artistic power. On questions of literature and art we must carry on a struggle on two fronts. (Mao 1971: 826; 1967: 89-90, my italics)

According to Mao, writing was to achieve a 'national form' (民族形式) recognisable to workers, peasants and soldiers and should represent 'real life' among these classes. The 'international form' prevalent in the pre-war years should be done away with, as should speculation or fancy that had no immediate base in objective reality or 'actual circumstances:' all these factors represented a 'formalist' approach to writing and were, by their very nature as such, and in light of the 'unity of politics and art,' obviously reactionary. When the national literary field was reassembled after 1949, it was with Party cadres doubling every position down to the individual writer and it no longer made sense to talk about a 'third category' of politically unaffiliated writers in the mainland literary field: there existed only the two broad categories of the politically correct and the reactionary, and although there were certainly various levels within each, there was no doubt about who had the upper hand.

Alternate temporalities: opening the counter-system

In the first five years of the War of Resistance, Hong Kong had experienced a steady influx of writers from the mainland. In the British colony these writers were faced with a fully functioning and bilingual literary field that was, if not 'financially autonomous,' then at least fully disengaged from local party-affiliation, state censure, or political dogmas pertaining to the theory of writing. At the same time, these writers were able to infuse this field with residual energy from the mainland and generate a new literary centre that would grow into the capital of the counter-system in the decades to come. The literary refugees from the mainland who were to make Hong Kong their new home in the course of the War counted prominent names such as Xiao Hong 蕭紅 (1911-1942), who arrived in the colony in 1940, as well as others, like Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981),[6] who intentionally made their stay more temporary. When the city fell late in 1941, it naturally ushered in a period of instability for the literary field as well; the relative brevity of this period, however, might have ensured that the intervention did not inflict permanent damage upon the positions and institutions in the field, and it was able to seamlessly recuperate after the Japanese surrender.

The end of the Civil War and founding of the People's Republic gave rise to a new influx of literary refugees from the mainland, among them Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) 張愛玲 (1920-1995), who had previously studied at the University of Hong Kong between 1939 and 1941, but returned to Shanghai after the colony fell to the Japanese and the university shut down. Back in Shanghai, Zhang found a literary scene largely vacated by radicals of any sort, and won quick success among a relatively broad readership. After the Communists came to power, however, Zhang's class background and bourgeois themes made her an eligible target for criticism,[7] and in 1952 she had to escape into exile in Hong Kong. There she accepted a job as writer and translator for the United States Information Service, under which she published the two novels *Yang Ge* 秧歌 and *Chidi zhi Lian* 赤地之戀 in 1954, which she translated herself into English as *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1955) and *Naked Earth* (1956).[8] I a review of the latter work, one American critic applauded Zhang as 'the only novelist of real competence who has deserted Red China and written of life in

[6] Among other activities, Mao Dun briefly edited the literary supplement to *Libao* (立報) in 1938 (Lee 1999: 328). Xiao Hong died two years after arriving in Hong Kong, in 1942.
[7] David Wang writes in the 'Foreword' to the 1998 edition of *The Rice-Sprout Song*, that '[a]t a time when most Chinese writers, women and men alike, were eager to exchange individual subjectivity for a collective, national one, Chang's [Zhang's] own brand of selfish and feminine mannerism stood out as a genuinely defiant gesture' (Wang 1988: xiv).
[8] Zhang's agent allegedly provided both plot and outline to *Yang Ge* (cited in Yin 1998: 182).

that country from this side of the Bamboo Curtain,' and asserted that the book 'opens a clearer window on life in Red China and the essential character of the new regime than could half a dozen scholarly works on the subject' (Schoyer 1955: 18). In 1955 Zhang Ailing moved to the United States, where she met with Hu Shi, and continued her writing career in exile.

Hu Shi had served as Chinese ambassador to the United States between 1938 and 1942, after which he had returned to Peking University. After 1949 he resettled once again in the US, this time until 1958, when he moved to Taiwan to assume the presidency at Academia Sinica. By this point Hu Shi had already become deeply implicated in the discursive boundary drawing between Communist China, 'Free China,' and the international community. Already during his time as ambassador, he was praised for being a 'representative of the best of the new and the old China,' and for being 'well qualified to explain China to the United States and the United States to China' (*New York Times*, September 20, 1938; quoted in Grieder 1970: 294). After 1949, and particularly after he settled in Taiwan, he evolved, in Jerome Gieder's words, into '"Free" China's most conspicuous intellectual ornament, the most prestigious survivor of the May Fourth generation on the island, a visible link with the hopeful era of the twenties' (Grieder 1970: 311). On the mainland, however, his merits in the New Culture Movement were not held in particularly high regard, and a series of political campaigns were launched in the early 1950 to smear his reputation as a running dog of American imperialism—and significantly, his bourgeois disposition for academic study uninvolved in the immediate socio-political concerns of the day. Hu Shi, and to a lesser extent Zhang Ailing, became in this way caught up in the struggle for discursive hegemony between the two emerging 'systems' of Chinese literary space—systems that were to evolve and consolidate over the next decades.

Zhang for her part, remained in the US and translated one more of her own novels and some shorter pieces into English, in addition to a few original compositions, but otherwise her main literary language continued to be Chinese, with publishers in Hong Kong and Taipei. C. T. Hsia was one of the first scholars to assess Zhang's reputation in international terms, as 'not only the best and most important writer in Chinese today,' but an equal to the likes of Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980), Eudora Welty (1909-2001), and Carson McCullers (1917-1967); *The Rice-Sprout Song*, Hsia reckoned, 'is already to be placed among the classics of Chinese fiction' (Hsia 1999: 389). Zhang Ailing can in this sense be seen as progressively disentangling herself from the emerging 'national forms' and gesturing instead towards the transatlantic temporality of the World Republic of Letters.

As opposed to Hong Kong, the mainland refugees to Taiwan brought a political system with them that was only too sensitive to the unfortunate effects of leftwing literary practices, and the KMT consequently banned most pre-1949 Chinese writing that tended the least bit leftwards; however, anything that might pertain to the so-called 'third category' or a variety of the genres formally known as 'bourgeois' were largely left alone (Chang and Owen 2010: 617; Bailey 1996: 94). As Yvonne Chang writes, '[a]lthough the government maintained its grip on the cultural infrastructure, the market had already begun to facilitate what Bourdieu calls a "process of autonomisation" of the literary field. The relationship of its aesthetic positions to external forces was increasingly mediated by the field's own operational laws' (Chang, S. 2004: 7). From 1949 to the lifting of martial law in 1987, the Taiwanese literary field was still to a large extent mutually exclusive vis-à-vis the mainland; but whereas the PRC system was generally closed off to the outside until 1978 and run, as recounted above, on Beijing Time, the Taiwanese field maintained a dialogue with the rest of the world and was thus also able to some extent to stay attuned to World Literary Time—as long as this did not directly implicate politically sensitive material. The rise of Taiwanese nationalism in the 1980s effected a re-conceptualisation of a national Taiwanese literature as opposed to an alternative system of *Chinese literature*.

Following the lifting of martial law, and parallel to the rise of the Democratic Progressive Party (民進黨) as legal political opposition to the Kuomintang, the Taiwanese cultural field has, with acute self-awareness, been splitting its hybridised self into minor constituents on pretexts of ethnicity and tradition. The bifurcation of Taiwanese culture (a project associated with the DPP) into discrete categories of, on the one hand the island's 'original peoples'—various aboriginal tribes, the Southern Min, and the Hakka—and on the other the Chinese 'colonisers' (associated with the KMT) consisting of mainlanders and their descendants, generates in addition to obvious ethnic tension a self-conscious discursive duality visible in various areas of cultural production. The cultural hybridisation that translates into the Taiwanese literary field as *benshangren* (本省人) and *waishengren* (外省人) literature—the literatures with indigenous and 'foreign' pretexts—can be seen to create an atmosphere of 'internal exile' for Taiwanese writers with Chinese ancestry (Peng 2011; see also Tang 2007 and Brown 2004: 9-10).

While Taiwan has seen the establishment of a national identity in international literary space since the 1980s, the Hong Kong space appears significantly weaker; as a field, however, it performs a crucial function in the counter-system—and to an increasing extent the PRC system as well. The

literary spaces of Taiwan and Hong Kong have thus seen development, not divorced from, but distinct to the one on the mainland, but have also served as important places of literary production and, specifically, publication for mainland writers; whether or not these were out of favour with the current political line. Both were colonial possessions in the first half of the twentieth century, the former until the Japanese capitulation in 1945 and the latter—which was also under Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945—until it was 'returned to the motherland' (回歸祖國) in 1997. Although the administration of Hong Kong has been handed over to Beijing, it still enjoys the privilege of 'one country, two systems' (一國兩制), and thus continues to publish both state-approved and 'dissident' writing from the mainland. Taiwan has so far declined 'reunification with the motherland' despite continuous approaches from Beijing. Like Hong Kong, Taipei has been an important centre for production and publication of Chinese literature since 1949, and particularly from the mid-1980s onwards.

While a comprehensive analysis of the development and structure of the literary fields in either Hong Kong or Taiwan (as well as Singapore or even more dispersed locations) is beyond the scope of this study, their brief delineation is intended to point to the centres of publication—and spaces of symbolic production—for Chinese literature outside the Communist literary system. The fact of language constitutes Taiwan and Hong Kong as privileged, intermediary spaces of exile for the mainland writer. Besides familiarisation with the 'full,' *fanti*-script, the writer from the PRC does not have to learn any new tricks to engage fully in the local literary field. Even those who travel farther, but continue to write in Chinese, will often have to rely on publishers in Hong Kong or Taipei to bring out their works: these locations thus emerge as centres of production and publication for Chinese-language exile writing and are instrumental to the activities of the counter-system. To those who decide to write in other languages than Chinese, the situation is obviously different; but as it turns out, works by these writers will often have to go through either of these locations when and if they are translated 'back' into Chinese before they eventually reach the mainland.

In the course of the decentring of the mainland literary field in the 1930s and 1940s, certain writers—such as Hu Shi, Zhang Ailing, or, as will be given special attention in Chapter Eight, Lin Yutang—travelled far beyond the national borders, through the outposts of 'Greater China,' Hong Kong and Taiwan, towards locations farther away, often the United States, but without abandoning

their identities as Chinese writers in international space. In the mainland literary field, they had ceased to be so; although they might at a later point become re-appropriated as 'national' writers.

The establishment of the People's Republic and the adoption on the mainland of a centralised and strictly controlled literary system modelled on the USSR created a situation where writers who had been fortunate enough to escape abroad before 1949 either could not, or had no particular desire to, return to China after the new regime settled. Writers travelled as far away as North America, Europe, or Southeast Asia, and sometimes adopted the literary language of their host country. This situation somewhat repeated itself after the events of June Fourth 1989, which sent a new generation of writers into national or linguistic exile. At times, it must seem at least to the CCP, the 'narrative of China' in international literary space has to some extent been dominated by these 'exiles'—whom, according to leading narrative in the PRC, basically have no business doing so, since they by virtue of their physical absence from China are unable to represent 'real life' and concrete realities on the mainland. These 'concrete realities' will be taken up in Part Two.

Part Two

Writing Out of the Communist Literary System

Chapter Four

Beijing Time: Structure of the Communist Literary System

The standardisation of time following the Communist victory in 1949[1] also imposed its concept of temporality upon the literary field: 'Beijing Time' (synchronous, in the initial years, with 'Moscow Literary Time') was to be the new standard for literary time-keeping on the Chinese mainland; and although channels were certainly open (initially, at least) to the Soviet Union as well as to literatures of other 'oppressed nations and peoples,' the state served as the only sanctioning centre of distribution and consecration, and the 'seeds' sown in Yan'an in the early 1940s rapidly grew into an intricate network of political censorship and ideological surveillance. Not only was the Greenwich meridian of literature rejected, but any immediate access was effectively denied in the course of the sealing up and policing of the ideological boundaries of the nation in the first three decades of New China. Although voices critical of the totalitarian direction of the literary field were initially heard, the extraordinarily harsh treatment of dissenting writers quickly made these fewer and farther between as the party state gradually deepened its influence.

Changing temporalities and the founding of the PRC

The Chinese Writers' Association (中國作家協會) was founded approximately two months before the official establishment of the PRC (in July 1949) under its provisional name 'The All-China

[1] Prior to the Communist victory in the Civil War, five time zones had been observed on the Chinese mainland.

Association for Literary Workers' (中華全國文學工作者協會). A quasi-governmental institution with local branches dispersed throughout each province in the country, the Association served, in Perry Link's words, 'the complementary functions of providing the Party with a means of monitoring and controlling creative writing and of establishing a clear-cut ladder of success for writers within the socialist literary system' (Link 2000: 119). Its main journal was the monthly *Renmin Wenxue*, also founded in 1949, and initially with Mao Dun as general editor (who was also constituted chairman of the Writers' Association). In addition to this 'main publication,' there gradually appeared a variety of local literary journals published by their respective sub-branches of the Writers' Association, such as *Beijing Wenxue* 北京文學 [Beijng literature] and *Shanghai Wenxue* 上海文學 [Shanghai literature], founded in 1950 and 1953 respectively, or *Xizang Wenyi* [Tibet literature and art], founded in 1965 but not properly established until after the Cultural Revolution in 1977 as *Xizang Wenxue* 西藏文學 [Tibet literature]. By being directly affiliated with the central administration of the Writers' Association, *Renmin Wenxue* was naturally also the one closest to Party influence and was often seen as a yardstick for the 'politically correct' at any given time. According to the 'guideline for contributions' (稿約), that featured on the inside of the back-sleeve throughout most of the 1950s, the journal accepted the following manuscripts:

1. 詩歌、小說、散文、報告、速寫、劇本（包括電影劇本）等文學作品。
2. 關於創作問題的論文、作品評論、作家評論、關於古典文學的研究論文等。
3. 蘇聯、人民民主國家及其他各國的革命的文學作品與論文的翻譯。

1. Poetry, fiction, prose, reportage, sketches, drama (including movie scripts) and other literary works.
2. Essays on matters of creation, discussions on literary works, discussions on authors, as well as research and essays on classical literature, and so forth.
3. Translation of revolutionary literary works and essays from the Soviet Union, people's democracies, and various other countries.

While the first two points might not pose any major rift with mainland literary journals of the preceding four decades, the third point obviously signals a significant readjustment of the local allegiances to World Literary Time. It was not that the editors no longer wanted translated world literature of the 'first rank,' as Hu Shi had prescribed in the late 1910s; it was rather that conceptions of this ranking-system had slowly morphed into a radicalised version of the temporality espoused by leftist literary factions in the 1920s and the League of Leftwing Writers in the 1930s. Literature was in this sense still transnational in nature, although devised in a temporality that had been significantly displaced (if not turned upside down) and wherein China suddenly found itself

among the 'upper' or more progressive ranks. Clearly the Soviet Union, instead of France or England, enjoyed a central position in this new literary temporality, but 'revolutionary' literary potential might be located in 'various other countries' anywhere in the world—as long as this potential is devised in terms of social, class-oriented space and not, as seemed to be implied by the advocates of the 'third category' twenty years earlier, from within literary space itself.

Hu Feng 胡風 (1902-1985) was one of the first writers to experience the draconian measures of literary temporality in the People's Republic of China. After submitting his report *Guanyu Ji'nianlai Wenyi Shijian Qingkuang de Baogao* 關於幾年來文藝實踐情況的報告 [Report on the practice of literature and art in recent years] to the central leadership in 1954, he was labelled a counterrevolutionary, and a national campaign was launched in 1955, targeting writers of similar persuasions and jailing thousands in the process—among them Hu Feng himself, who was not released until 1979 (Chang and Owen 2010: 600).

These measures did not halt new initiatives, however, and in the midst of the seemingly positive political campaign to 'let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend' (百花齊放，百家爭鳴),[2] the literary bimonthly *Shouhuo* 收獲 [Harvest], was founded in Shanghai by Ba Jin and Jin Yi 靳以 (1909-1959) in 1957. The journal was also under the auspices of the Chinese Writers' Association but allegedly devoted exclusively to highbrow creative writing. It was discontinued between 1960 and 1964 and again from 1966 to 1979, but in its times of publication it has been one of the major flagships for so-called 'pure literature' (純文學) in the PRC literary field (Zhu 2009: 1). Particularly throughout the 1980s, several major works that were later to become national bestsellers were first published in the pages of *Shouhuo*. The inaugural issue from 1957 presented a line-up of established leftist writers that was fit to challenge the contents of any of the top-range Republican journals: Lu Xun's unpublished work 'Zhongguo Xiaoshuo de Lishi de Bianqian' 中國小說的歷史 的變遷 [The historical changes of Chinese fiction], Ai Wu's novel 'Bailian cheng Gang' 百煉成鋼 [Steeled and tempered] as well as Lao She's play 'Chaguan' 茶館 [Teahouse]. Rather than seeking their claims to legitimacy from concepts of an international literary temporality, as *Xiandai* or *Xin Qingnian* had done, reference was due instead to Beijing Time, which was the new sanctioning authority in the literary field. As evidenced in the opening paragraph of the 'foreword' (發刊詞) to the inaugural issue, Ba Jin and Jin Yi played this new

[2] On the questions that still surround the launch and aftermath of this movement, see: Kraus 2010 or King 2003.

game, and positioned *Shouhuo* right at the centre of the Communist literary system from the very beginning: 'The appearance of *Shouhuo* is a concrete manifestation of the policy of "letting a hundred flowers bloom." *Shouhuo* is a flower, and [we] hope it will grow into a fragrant flower […]. Beneficial to the socialist motherland, it is valuable spiritual nourishment [精神食糧] for the people' (Quoted in Wang Y. 2007).

The launch later in 1957 of the Anti-Rightist Campaign (反右派運動), however, stamped out these moments of optimism. The campaign was a powerful demonstration of the will to keep literature on Beijing Time, as well as evidence of an escalating paranoia over the consequences that would follow should writers stray from the designated time zone. Even the former CCP poster girl Ding Ling was not spared the off-hand distribution of 'rightist-labels' during the campaign, and was, as many others, sent for re-education in the countryside. Ding Ling's problem was, in the words of the Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Writers' Association at the time, Shao Quanlin 邵荃麟 (1906-1971), a problem of 'private ownership in the realm of ideas'—in other words, conceptions of literary autonomy: 'As everyone knows,' Shao pointed out, 'far from being cut off from what is going on in the world of letters, the Central Committee of the Party has a clearer and deeper understanding of the situation than writers themselves' (Shao 1958: 136): 'literature is not an individual pursuit which can be separated from the main task of the working class' (ibid: 138).[3]

Although Shao at this point clearly perceived himself as representing the central authority of the Party, and indeed was rising quickly in the hierarchy of the Communist literary system (second, by 1960, only to chief Party ideologue Zhou Yang), he was himself to become a target in a later 'rectification campaign.' Shao's falling into disfavour with the central leadership seems to be linked to a changed position on the issue he charges Ding Ling with—the 'private ownership' in the realm of literature. Rather than representing the stereotyped characters of heroic peasants (or workers or soldiers) and evil landlords, Shao ventured to argue that writers should strive to portray the 'characters in-between' (中間人物) based on their own reasoning and in their own words and leave interpretation to the reader, rather than feed him or her with ready-made conclusions. As Merle Goldman has shown, Shao 'struck directly at the [P]arty's basic political and ideological teachings' with these ideas, by questioning its 'objective' authority (Goldman 1981: 49). In a rectification

[3] The fact that the translation of Shao's text was published in the internationally distributed English-language journal *Chinese Literature*, which had contained one of Ding Ling's works in its inaugural issue, moreover, affirms a belief in the international reach of CCP-sanctioned literary time.

campaign launched by Zhou Yang in 1964, Shao became the main target for denunciation, and eventually died in prison in 1971.

The cases of both Shao Quanlin and Ding Ling show that principles for appropriating capital in the literary field—the literary criteria of failure and success—were tightly controlled by the central leadership of the Party. Positioning occurred strictly with reference to Beijing Time, and it is also clear that these positions, once assumed, were highly volatile and subject to follow the changes in the overall political climate. At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Yang became a target for criticism himself and was imprisoned until 1978.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, launched in 1966, performed the final erasure of autonomous principles in the mainland literary field when virtually all positions in the cultural establishment were relocated to a small elite within the Party overseen by Mao, and eventually his wife Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991). When creative works started appearing again after 1972, writes Hong Zicheng, these were overwhelmingly mired in contemporary socio-political issues, and 'dealt with the concrete circumstances of locality, customs, and everyday life in the coarsest, most cursory way:' 'the narrator was generally omniscient and would frequently adopt an overemotional, vigorously intrusive posture in strictly controlling the progression of the story. […] What the reader heard was the 'brutal' voice of ideological authority overriding the characters and the story' (Hong 2007b: 181; tr. Michael Day, Hong 2007a: 242). Writers and intellectuals who had been active on the literary scene since 1949, and initially tried to toe the political line, suffered widespread persecution, harassment or imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution; however, the most frequently used measure to deal with the 'intellectual class' was that of enforced internal exile, often to the national frontiers in the southwest or northeast, but always far from urban centres. This practice of banishment-as-education coincided with the 'movement' to send not only writers and intellectuals but scores of urban youths with anything more than the most rudimentary education to live and work with the peasants far from access to the currents of World Literary Time. Narratives of these mass-displacements came to dominate the Chinese literary scene after the Reforms and Opening in 1978, and demonstrate the significance of the tropes of 'movement' and 'displacement' in the characterisation of modern Chinese literature, which will be turned to in the following chapters.

Realignment of the system with World Literary Time

The dire conditions of the mainland literary field improved significantly after the formal end of the Cultural Revolution, when China officially entered a 'New Era' of Reforms and Opening in the late 1970s. Writers who had been denounced or sent for re-education in the countryside were rehabilitated and institutions in the field re-established—sometimes with the same individuals occupying their former positions in the cultural bureaucracy as they did prior to the Cultural Revolution. With the gradual 'opening' to the outside world followed also the inevitable confrontation with World Literary Time, as works and theories from abroad flowed in over the national border.

Increasing calls for creative freedom in the 1980s reportedly gave rise to a 'full-blown renaissance, a new Age of Enlightenment' (Chang and Owen 2010: 656)—unprecedented in the Communist literary system. A significant amount of study has been done into this period (e.g. Barmé 1999; Chen X. 1999; Wang J. 1997; Zhang X. 1997; Yang X. 1997; Hout 2000), and it is generally regarded as the most dynamic and creative period in China's recent literary history—until the events of June Fourth 1989 put a symbolic and bloody stop to this 'Age of Enlightenment.' Structurally the literary field benefitted from the systemic transitions taking place in society as a whole in the 1980s, where remnants of the centralised literary system under the Chinese Writers' Association were still in effect—and accorded writers both salaries and stipends as well as providing them with a national platform of distribution through the state-owned media. Moreover, the Reforms and Opening and calls for 'creative freedom' provided a fertile environment for experimentation with both form and content.

In *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Michelle Yeh defines three types of 'intellectual and artistic resources' that facilitated this 'renaissance:' first, a strong and prevalent urge to reinterpret 'Chinese culture' that permeated most of the cultural field and has come to be known as the 'cultural fever' (文化熱); second, the rediscovery and republishing of a vast range of Republican works that had not initially fitted the CCP canon; and third, the extensive (although restricted) translation of world literature (Yeh in Chang and Owen 2010: 656). Combined, these 'resources' made for an explosive cocktail and were thus necessarily closely observed by the political authorities who, despite the adoption of capitalism as a new socialist 'characteristic,' had not entirely abandoned their ambitions of running the literary field on Beijing Time. In the 1980s, political interventions in literary matters still frequently occurred through the means of political campaigns that tended to involve the whole of society in a united effort to do away with the

damaging influences of 'bourgeois liberalism' (資產階級自由化) or 'spiritual pollution' (精神污染).

The first and last of Yeh's 'intellectual and artistic resources' clearly recall the May Fourth era: the combination of a prevalent and intense desire to reinterpret 'Chinese culture' (in historical and comparative terms) and the influence of writing and ideas from abroad. A parallel also emerges in terms of the World Republic of Letters, insofar as the literary field was able—despite censorship and political campaigns—to engage with international literary space relatively unmediated by the political leadership. As in the late 1910s, translations from the canon of world literature became instrumental in the partial reclaiming of literary space; and again, it was implicit that national Chinese literature needed to 'catch up' with World Literary Time.[4]

The 'tremendous upsurge' of official and unofficial literary journals during the first two years of the Reform period created ample opportunities for writers—even those outside the official establishment—to get their works published and distributed (McDougall 2003: 174-175).[5] When *Shouhuo* was resurrected for the second time in January 1979 it was still with Ba Jin as editor, and the journal thus seemingly presented a sticking continuity, not only with the PRC field before the Cultural Revolution but the Republican field as well. Although literary journals once again gained prominence, and came to represent the standards of 'high taste' (in tune with international literary time) as they had done in the 1910s-1930s, their presence in the field was constituted on significantly different terms. As related above, the official journals were directly overseen by either the first of second tier of the Writers' Association (which in turn answered to the central political administration); at the same time, the consolidation of the literary system since 1949—despite the fact that it had been relatively de-radicalised—still provided the basic structure for monitoring and

[4] Translated foreign works had previously been available to a select inner-circle of the Communist Party through the *neibu* (内部) editions: a restricted and highly limited publication-run of 'decadent' or 'bourgeois' foreign works intended for scrutiny in connection with policy-making and the direction of political campaigns. Virtually all these *neibu* publications had, at one moment or other, leaked and circulated privately often in hand-copied or highly revered original editions, during the revolutionary years. Bei Dao, for instance, describes these books as 'a privileged, highly sought-after object in the cultural salons among the educated youth in Beijing,' and claims that they 'exerted an indescribable influence on the development of Chinese literature' (Bei 1993b: 63-64). It is significant that these editions frequently turn up in works dealing with the 'Down to the Countryside Movement' (上山下鄉運動)—particularly among the generation of writers who went into exile in the 1980s. Dai Sijie's 戴思杰 (b. 1954) *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise* from 2000, tr. as *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2001), is one of the more obvious examples.

[5] Bonnie McDougall reports, that by the end of 1980 there existed 180 nationally and provincially circulated literary journals in China; some of the former with a circulation of up to a million copies (McDougall 2003: 200, n. 10).

controlling writers as it did before: the system had been reformed, but the basic structure was still intact.

Parallel to the official publications, private publishing, which was tolerated but not condoned by the authorities (Kong, S. 2005: 65-66), was evolving into a 'second channel' (二渠道) outside the hegemony of the Writers' Association. In 1978, a group of Beijing-based poets spearheaded by Bei Dao founded the underground literary journal *Jintian* 今天 [Today] as part of the Democracy Wall activities in Beijing in 1978.[6] It was somewhat closer to the spirit of the Republican journals insofar as it was associated with a specific group of writers, uninvolved with state power and the cultural bureaucracy, and with what appeared to be a clear 'aesthetic' dimension to their activities. In this sense the publication of *Jintian* can be considered a 'landmark in PRC literary history' since it, for the first time since 1949, 'defied the state's monopoly on literature' (Van Crevel 2008: 7) although necessarily without confronting it head-on. The name of the journal furthermore echoed *Xiandai*'s emphasis on the literary present: 'the past is already gone and the future still far away, but for our generation, today, there is only today!' (*Jintian* bianjibu 1979: 2).

In a note to the reader in the first issue, the editors express a sense of urgency in catching up with World Literary Time: 'history has finally granted an opportunity for our generation to sing aloud those songs we have carried in our hearts for a decade, without again having to incur the thunder of punishment. We cannot wait any longer; waiting is to move backwards—because history is already moving forward' (ibid: 1). The official end to the Cultural Revolution, and hence the 'decade' of persecuting writers and artists for speaking out, had clearly instilled a hope for the future of Chinese literature—and there was no time to waste in 'catching up' with history and asserting oneself in the world. This was not the radical iconoclasm of the May Fourth Era, however: even though Maoism as official state doctrine had been played down considerably with the Reforms and Opening, it seems that the editors were still sensitive enough to the central narrative and cleverly couched their editorial in a long quote from Karl Marx in addition to the symbolic denunciation of the Gang of Four (四人幫). It was hardly a canonised Marxist text though, but Marx' very first journalistic piece of writing, 'Bemerkungen über die Neueste Preußische Zensurinstruktion' [Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction], originally intended

[6] The Democracy Wall movement spread from Xidan in Beijing to other parts of the country between late 1978 and early 1979. The ex Red Guard political activists involved in this movement, writes Merle Goldman, 'used the methods they had learned in the Cultural Revolution to express their views against authority: to write wall posters, mimeograph and distribute pamphlets, form groups of like-minded people, make speeches, and engage in debates' (Goldman 2002: 503).

for publication in 1942, but only published in Switzerland the following year due to issues of censorship in Prussia. The *Jintian* editorial department quotes a passage where Marx likens modes of expression in writing to the variety of colours and flavours found in nature: the uniformity in writing advocated by the Prussian censorship bureau obviously ran counter to the laws of nature: 'Every dewdrop in the sun glitters in an infinite play of colours, but the light of the mind is to produce only one, only the *official colour*;' the mind 'is to be dressed only in black, and yet there are no black flowers' (ibid; Marx 1967: 71, tr. Loyd Easton). The editors are quick to point their fingers at the official scapegoat: 'the cultural autocracy perpetrated by "the Gang of Four," was that it allowed the mind to have only one existential form [存在形式]—which was a false form; and that it allowed only one type of flower to grow on the literary scene—which was a black flower' (*Jintian* bianjibu 1978: 1). The metaphor of flowers was probably not accidental, and clearly recalled the aborted movement to 'let a hundred flowers bloom' two decades earlier, and thus necessarily also its aftermath, the Anti-Rightist Campaign. In the light of these issues, it was obviously necessary to tread carefully and avoid discrediting the central narrative—hence the obligatory reference points of Marx and the Gang.

Even though it might have appeared so at the time, neither censorship nor 'cultural autocracy' was on the decline and *Jintian* was shut down in December 1980, having run only nine issues. By the time the journal was shut down, the sometimes derogatory tag: 'menglong poetry' 朦朧詩 [Obscure poetry] had been employed to describe much of the output by the affiliated writers. The expression had spread through a critical essay by Zhang Ming 章明 (b. 1961), entitled 'Lingren Qimen de Menglong' 令人氣悶的「朦朧」 [The depressing 'menglong'] and published in *Shikan* 詩刊 [Poetry journal] (No. 8, 1980).[7] The charge was one of unintelligibility, and Zhang Ming carried this out with what appeared as a return to the discourse of 'national forms:'

> 固然，一看就懂的詩不一定就是好詩，但叫人看不懂的詩却决不是好詩，也决受不到廣大讀者的歡迎。如果這種詩體占了上風，新詩的聲譽也會由此受到影響甚至給敗壞掉的。我們需要向世界各國的好詩汲取營養，决不能閉目塞聽；但千萬不能因此丟掉我們自己的民族風格。
> Of course, a poem you look at once and immediately understand is not necessarily a good poem, but a poem that is impossible to understand is definitely not a good poem and will surely not be appreciated by the vast majority of readers. If this poetic form prevails, the prestige of new poetry will also be affected and even ruined from the consequences. We have to absorb nourishment from the good

[7] *Shikan* was founded in 1957 as the first nationally circulated poetry journal in the PRC. In the issue in question, the editors apparently intended to spark the debate over the new type of poetry by presenting two conflicting assessments of the new poetry—the other essay taking a positive stance towards menglong poetry. For an overview of the wide-ranging debate about menglong poetry in the early 1980s, see Van Crevel 1996: 71-76.

> poetry of various countries in the world, and must not lose touch with reality; but under no circumstances must we lose our national character in the process. (Zhang M. 1980: 55)

The issue of 'national character' lies at the heart of Zhang Ming's critique of the unintelligible new poetry; in his assessment of one 'menglong' poem by Du Yunxie 杜運燮 (1915-2002), he exclaims: 'This does not appear to be the Chinese language; it seems as if the author has first written it out in a foreign language and then translated it into Chinese' (ibid: 54). The charge is in fact not that dissimilar from the one voiced by Stephen Owen in relation to Bei Dao: it is the transgression of the 'Chinese form' in the Chinese language that is deemed intolerable. In both instances the writer is taken to task for the failure to correspond to accepted standards of a 'national character.' The idea of 'absorbing nourishment' from world poetry to sustain a 'national character' might not seem too far from Hu Shi's position in the late 1910s, however, it clearly differed from Hu Shi in terms of the constitution of this national character: while it was open-ended and in 'transition' during the May Fourth Era it was, at least in the eyes of establishment critics, much more 'consolidated' by the time of the New Era. Chinese national character was not up for negotiation unless it emanated from within the Party itself; in this sense, the 'international character' of 'foreign' literary styles and techniques was naturally seen as a threat to the structural constitution of the national subject. It was the pernicious influence of 'modernism,' as it was generally named, that worried establishment critics in the early 1980s.

Despite these setbacks, the editors of the government-run journals were growing more and more bold, and by the early 1980s the most obvious traces of Party politics had vanished from *Shouhuo* and even *Renmin Wenxue* in favour of what appeared to be a reestablishment of the ties to international literary space. The strict formal requirements that had dominated these publications from the beginning—the 'national forms' advocated in Mao's 'Talks,' and taken to the extreme during the general excesses of the Cultural Revolution—were gradually waning; but although cultural policies, in the context of the preceding decade, might point in the direction of a relative 'warming' of the literary climate, a 'cooling' soon replaced the 'Beijing Spring' of the late 1970s (Link 2000: 14).

In 1981 Gao Xingjian made a sustained case for the 'international forms' of world literature in favour of the 'national forms' of the Maoist paradigm. In *Xiandai Xiaoshuo Jiqiao Chutan* 現代小說技巧初探 [Preliminary investigation on the techniques of modern fiction], he asked what the concept of 'national forms' actually implied in the context of literature. Since the May Fourth Era,

he argued, Chinese literature had frequently borrowed from other literary traditions, which in turn had received influence from Chinese literary works. Writers in the socialist literary canon like Mao Dun, Ba Jin, Lao She, and Ding Ling 'all absorbed the expressive techniques of western fiction, but also developed their own unique style' (Gao 1981: 75); and Lu Xun, the biggest icon of them all, displayed obvious traces of symbolism, impressionism, and surrealism without it affecting the 'national character' of his works or their value to posterity and the progress of socialist civilisation. Literary forms, Gao seemed to imply, follow the fluctuations of World Literary Time, not locally constituted temporalities: 'artistic techniques transgress national boundaries and do not serve the specific purposes of any one nationality [民族]' (ibid: 77). The charge that 'modernism' or other literary 'techniques' were fundamentally alien, and by implication hostile, to the national character was in Gao's thesis rendered invalid.

'National characteristics' (民族的特色), he continued, should rather be located in the artistic potential of the national *language*: 'all literary works written in Chinese or the languages of other national minorities are part of the characteristics of that nationality' (ibid: 74).

> 語言是思維的手段和實現。用民族語言來進行文學創作，必然會把本民族的文化傳統、生活方式、思維習慣帶進作品中去。作家哪怕再怎樣借鑒外國文學的手法，只要是用道道地地的中文寫作，就肯定會帶上本民族的色彩。作家倘對本民族文化的修養越高，這種民族特色就越鮮明。高爾基筆下的意大利只能是俄羅斯文學中的意大利，正如旅居美國的華僑作家筆下的美國，同生根於美國的美國作家筆下的美國，無論如何是兩回事。
>
> Language is the means and realisation of thought. When one uses a national language in the composition of literature, one necessarily brings that nationality's cultural traditions, ways of living, and habits of thinking into the work. If writers continue to worry about the influence of foreign literary techniques, they only have to write in authentic [*daodaodidi*] Chinese, and they will surely add to the nationality's distinctiveness. The more a writer cultivates the accomplishments of this national culture, the more distinctive these national characteristics will be. The Italy in Gorky's writing can only be the Italy of Russian literature, just like the America in the writings of overseas Chinese residing in America and the America in writings by American writers who have taken root in America, no matter how you look at it, are two entirely different things. (ibid)

Although Gao was to refine his position on 'national characteristics' in subsequent years, it is clear that already at this point he was confident in forwarding the principles of international literary space in opposition to establishment narratives of national forms and characteristics. The construction of an ontological juncture between language and representation, which seems to suggest a transnational approach to the literary narrative without depriving language of its national character, is noteworthy in the light of Gao Xingjian's literary exile less than ten years later, and will be treated in subsequent chapters.

Gao's thesis, along with similar claims to 'international forms' in the name of World Literary Time, naturally met with significant opposition from establishment critics (Larson 1989: 56-61; Pollard 1985), and in late 1983 he and four other writers[8] were singled out for criticism by the central administration following the launch of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (清除精神污染運動). Wendy Larson writes that, the basis for criticising Gao Xingjian was apparently the 'acceptance of modernism and rejection of realism' in his writings (ibid: 61). Insofar as western society, in the eyes of establishment analysts, manifested issues of 'fragmentation, loss of vision, and a sense of incompleteness,' a literature that somehow embodied these issues was appropriate; however, in the official narrative of socialist civilisation in the PRC these issues did not exist, and thus had no place in Chinese literature: 'modernism is viewed as a kind of realism appropriate to the Western situation—the kind of writing that uses reflection of reality much in the same way as realism' (ibid: 64).

The core of the problem was obviously located in the sustainability of a politicised cultural space in the context of the 'open door policy.' As Deng Xiaoping pointed out in a talk at the Second Plenary Session of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CCP, 'we must continue to expand our cultural exchange with other countries,' but whereas economic exchange had followed a 'dual policy' of selective opening, so as not to 'introduce anything without a purpose and a plan' and to 'combat all corrupting bourgeois influences,' Deng asks rhetorically, 'why is it, then, that when it comes to cultural exchanges, we have allowed harmful elements of bourgeois culture to be introduced without impediment?'

> 我們要向資本主義發達國家學習先進的科學、技術、經營管理方法以及其他一切對我們有益的知識和文化，閉關自守、故步自封是愚蠢的。但是，屬於文化領域的東西，一定要用馬克思主義對它們的思想內容和表現方法進行分析、鑒別和批判。[…] 對於西方學術文化的介紹如此混亂，以至連一些在西方國家也認為低級庸俗或有害的書籍、電影、音樂、舞蹈以及錄像、音樂，這幾年也輸入不少。這種用西方資產階級沒落文化來腐蝕青年的狀況，再也不能容忍了。
> If we want to learn from developed capitalist countries and take advantage of such advances in science, technology, management and other areas as may be useful to us, it would be foolish to keep our doors closed and persist in the same old ways. But in learning things in the cultural realm, we must adopt a Marxist approach, analysing them, distinguishing the good from the bad and making a critical judgement about their *ideological content* and *artistic form*. […] There has been such confusion in the importing of Western academic and cultural things that in recent years we have witnessed an influx of books, films, music, dances, and audio and video recordings that even in Western countries are regarded as pernicious junk. This corruption of our young people by the *decadent bourgeois culture of*

[8] These were Li Tuo 李陀 (b. 1939), Zhang Xinxin 張辛欣 (b. 1953), Dai Houying 戴厚英 (1938-1996), and Peng Ning 彭寧 (b. 1958), see Larson 1989: 60-61.

> *the West* is no longer tolerable. (Deng 1993: 44; tr. Bureau for the Compilation and Translation etc., Deng 1994: 54, my italics)

Besides making clear the general problematic envisioned in the threat by foreign spiritual pollution, Deng's statements also lay bare the fundamental problem faced by the Party in the early 1980s, namely that, while being able to control the inflow of cultural products with relative success, it had proven significantly more difficult to control—in the abstract sense—the realm of ideas. In order to contain the spread of harmful and, it is understood, *foreign* ideas, the authorities would have to observe the 'ideological content' (思想內容) and 'artistic form' (表現方法) of creative works closely.

Whether influenced or not by this type of political pressure, there also emerged a tendency towards an 'inward' literary gaze around the mid-1980s. In 'Wenxue de Gen' 文學之根 [The roots of literature], published in *Zuojia* 作家 [Writer], No. 4, 1985, Han Shaogong 韓少功 (b. 1953) made himself spokesperson for a literature that proclaimed to investigate the deeper levels of culture—what he termed 'roots' or 'origins'—as opposed to a literature that only scratched the surface of 'normative culture' by addressing immediate social, cultural, or political concerns. Whereas the 'surface levels' of Chinese culture had been characterised by processes of centralisation and homogenisation, vestiges of traditional culture were still visible in the countryside—or the 'native soil' (鄉土) on the peripheries of Chinese cultural space. Han was not addressing a time before Maoism, or even 'modern China' in the broad sense, but a culture prior even to the influences of Confucianism and Buddhism—in other words, the 'central tradition'[9] of Chinese civilisation. He emphasises in particular Chu 楚 (1042-223BC) culture, but local 'roots' might be discovered in any cultural or ethnic peripheral area (from the viewpoint of the 'central tradition'), preferably as far away as possible from the most immediate effects of modernity. The idea of *place* is essential: only in Western Hunan, for instance, might one discover linguistic or syntactic remnants of the *Chu Ci* 楚辭 [Songs of Chu], compiled in the second century AD. The fascination with Western Hunan was not unlike the one entertained by Shen Congwen half a century earlier, but in general these later writers supposedly did not perceive of any immediate legacy in the 'native soil literature' (鄉土文學) of the Republican period (Leenhouts 2003: 534). In Han Shaogong's thesis, these local cultures constituted the 'roots' of the contemporary and

[9] Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft defines a 'Central Tradition' running through most of the classical period of Chinese history that has claimed 'universal and unlimited validity. It theoretically had the answers to all meaningful questions about man, society, and the cosmos' (Idema and Haft 1997: 25).

encompassing space of Chinese culture; and although these marginal cultures might be hidden deep underneath the surface, they were essential to the development and invigoration of the central or 'normative' (規範) culture:

> 在一定的時候，規範的東西總是絕處逢生，依靠對不規範的東西進行批判地吸收，來獲得營養，獲得更新再生的契機。宋詞，元曲，明清小說，都是前鑒。因此，從某種意義上說，不是地殼而是地下的岩漿，更值得作家們主義。
> At certain times, normative things will have to survive by the means of a critical absorption of non-normative things, so that they might gain sustenance and an opportunity for renewal and rebirth. Song Dynasty *ci*-poetry, Yuan Dynasty lyrical verse [*qu*], and the fiction of the Ming and Qing Dynasties are all examples of this. In some sense it might thus be argued that, rather than the earth's crust, it is the underground magma that deserves writers' attention. (Han 1997: 357)

Han's call to 'look beneath the surface' naturally has to be seen in the light of Chinese literary history of the preceding three decades, where only neat surfaces were observed in line with the central dictates of the Party. The stereotypical representation of Communist heroes and the guidelines for narrative and representation in the Maoist literary framework were obviously challenged by Han's call to 'look beneath;' at the same time, however, his criticism of the 'earth's crust' might itself be too preoccupied with establishing 'surfaces:'

> 這絲毫不意味着閉關自守，不是反對文化的對外開放，相反，只有找到異己的參照系，吸收和消化異己的因素，才能認清和充實自己。但有一點似應指出，我們讀外國文學，多是讀翻譯作品，而被譯的多是外國的經典作品、流行作品或獲獎作品，即已入規範的東西。從人家的規範中來尋找自己的規範，模仿翻譯作品來建立一個中國的「外國文學流派」，想必前景黯淡。
> This does not by any means imply closure and self-reliance; it does not oppose culture's openness to the outside. On the contrary: one first has to discover the other's (*yiji*) frame of reference and the elements that absorb and digest the other, only then is it possible to understand and develop oneself. But there is one thing that needs to be pointed out: when we read foreign literature we read predominantly translated works, and insofar as the works that are translated are predominantly foreign classics, popular works, or works that have won prizes, they have already entered the normative. The search for one's own norms within other people's norms, and the imitation of translated works in order to establish a Chinese 'foreign literary school,' surely has gloomy prospects. (ibid)

In Han Shaogong's historical optics, Chinese literature appears to be a multi-centred and multi-layered space; 'originating' from various different 'sources' at the deepest levels of cultural identity. The decentring of Chinese culture, away from the Yellow River Basin across localities of various ethnic groups all the way to Xinjiang or Tibet, however, is a double-edged sword: while it advocates minoritising 'normative things' (or the Central Tradition), it also consumes 'other' ethnic groups as the 'roots' of the national Chinese subject. Their otherness is 'absorbed and digested' through historical processes, but at certain junctures, the majority subject must look to its various constituents for sustenance and renewal: 'amidst all the changes,' writes Han, 'China is still China;

and in respect of art and literature in particular, in those deep-seated aspects of the spiritual and cultural characteristics of the people [民族], we possess a national self [民族的自我]' (ibid: 359).

Han's thesis can in this sense be seen as, at least partially, accepting the principle of world literary space (processes of development in disparate traditions are comparable and interactive) while dismissing the notion of World Literary Time (processes remain disparate despite their comparability and interaction). On the one hand, Han Shaogong argues for literary autonomy: a literature uninvolved with politics and social fads. It is also here that he finds fault with the May Fourth generation, in that it was too preoccupied with political change and too receptive to 'foreign' literary trends. Foreign influences are necessary in the expansion of the 'field of vision,' but on the other hand,

> people who eat beef do not become cows, and people who eat dog meat do not become dogs, even if they want to. Any copy is inferior to the original work, so I don't agree with copying the Russians or Americans. In my essays I argue for 'releasing the energy of modern ideas, recasting and broadening the self among our people,' and uniting global consciousness with consciousness of one's roots. I've advocated that Chinese literature and other people's literatures 'march forward together along separate roads.' (Han 1992: 149, tr. David Wakefield,)

Unlike Han's thesis, the writers labelled as '*xianfeng*' (先鋒) or 'avant-garde' clearly displayed a keener attention to the implied historicity of World Literary Time; and although their activities might not amount to actual 'copying,' they liberally applied formal, theoretical, and stylistic features from the modernist canons of world literature. They had no common ideological ground like the roots-writers, however, and only in retrospect came to define their work as 'avant-garde literature' (e.g. Ma Y. 2009: 422-426). As I have argued elsewhere, the emergence of the concept of 'avant-garde writing'—or even an 'avant-garde school' (先鋒派)—in literary theory in China in the 1980s was spurred, at least in part, by a desire for the realisation of a literary field in relative autonomy from political and economic processes with a clear sense of precedent in 'other people's literatures'—there was only one 'road,' it was implied, and Chinese literature was once again 'lacking behind' (Damgaard 2007). Local processes were reflected in the transnational logic of the World Republic of Letters, in the definition and assessment of *xianfeng* literature; and insofar as the 'avant-garde' was generally theorised as the most autonomous position in any given literary field, it signalled also a measure of consolidation and overall 'maturity' of a given national literature. In the context of the aftermath to the ravishments of the Cultural Revolution, the very definition of an avant-garde was essential to the imagination of Chinese literature as a *modern literature*. Ma Yuan is often defined as the 'initiator' (始作俑者) of Chinese 'avant-garde fiction' (先鋒小說) (Hong

2007b: 293) or innovator of 'formalist fiction' in post-revolutionary China (Zhao 1995). The specific nature of Ma's avant-gardism will be treated in the following chapters.

In the editorial to the January/February issue of *Renmin Wenxue* in 1987, the editors enthusiastically called for Chinese literature to reform along the lines of the wider socio-political processes, and 'advance towards the world' (走向世界) with the rest of society:

> 文學也要開放。「走向世界」之聲日趨高漲。本刊一向是外部世界窺視中國文學發展狀態的重要窗口。[…]本刊是一本刊載以華文為創作母語的作品的文學刊物，因此它首先應當走向閱讀華文的世界，也就是首先應當面對中國本土，盡可能滿足盡量多層次的中國讀者的審美需求。在這一基礎上，才有可能向非華文世界提供中國文學的代表作。
> Literature should also open up; the sound of the 'advance towards the world' is soaring by the day. This journal has always served as an important window for the outside world to catch a glimpse of the state of development of Chinese literature. […] Due to the fact that this is a literary journal that publishes works created in the mother tongue of Chinese, it should first of all advance towards the Chinese-reading world—which means that it should first of all face China proper, and do its utmost to satisfy the aesthetic requirements of as many sectors of Chinese readers a possible. Only on a foundation like this, are we able to provide representative works of Chinese literature to the non-Sinophone world. (*Renmin Wenxue* bianjibu 1987: 5)

In the context of the editors' optimism, it was not without a certain bitter irony that the 'window' provided by *Renmin Wenxue* for the rest of the world to 'catch a glimpse' of Chinese literature was shut tight immediately after publication and all copies withdrawn and destroyed by the authorities. The concern was the inclusion in the issue of Ma Jian's novella 'Liangchu nide Shetai huo Kongkongdangdang' 亮出你的舌苔或空空荡荡 [Stick out your tongue or emptiness]; a work set in Tibet and framed loosely around Ma's own travels in the region in 1985. The problem was one of ethno-national representation—which naturally grew in proportion due to *Renmin Wenxue*'s position as an international literary 'window.' According to official statements that circulated at the time, Ma Jian's work 'severely distorts the life and image of the Tibetan people and hurts national feelings (民族感情); it is in direct violation of the Party and the nation's ethnic (民族) and religious policies, as well as policies concerning literature and art' (Xinhuashe 1987).[10] While Ma Jian was already in Hong Kong at the time, the editor-in-chief—Liu Xinwu 劉心武 (b. 1942), who

[10] For once Tibetan intellectuals seemed to agree with the political line in Beijing, in what they saw as a gross misrepresentation of Tibetan culture and religion. But that was not all, liberal critics both inside and outside China has deemed the work exoticist and essentialising, and illustrative of an unfortunate trend in experimental or 'post-modern' Chinese literature in the 1980s, where a writer would randomly appropriate 'the most sacred aspects of Tibetan Buddhism' in their playful experimentation with the text (Barmé and Minford 1988: 452). Despite this fact, and despite the brevity of the text, the work was published in a single-volume French translation in 1993 as *La Mendiante de Shigatze* and in English in 2006 as *Stick out Your Tongue*.

had kick-started the wave of 'scar' literature in 1977 with the short story 'Banzhuren' 班主任 [The class teacher], and been an important player in the literary field after the Cultural Revolution—was sacked from his position and forced to write a self-criticism that accounted for his severe lack of judgement in including Ma Jian's text in the issue (ibid).

As will be shown in the next two chapters, the question of ethnic representation in the PRC in the 1980s was ambiguous at best. The 'severe distortion' of the image of 'our Tibetan compatriots' (藏族同胞) was not the only issue at hand in the denunciation of Ma Jian and Liu Xinwu; rather, the concern displayed by the censors in this situation might be seen, on the one hand, as a concern with the *right* to represent—meaning the proper management of the official narrative of the 'internal other.' On the other hand, there was also a formal concern that implied not only 'bad style,' but specifically the use of the first-person narrator:

> 小說運用第一人稱手法，獵取在西藏的所謂奇聞異事，用聳人聽聞的語言，肆意歪曲西藏地區的風貌，醜化藏族同胞的形象，同時渲泄了作者沈溺肉慾與追求金錢的卑劣心理，是一篇內容污穢、格調地下的所謂「探索性」作品。
> The fictional work applies the technique of the first-person [narrator] to hunt for so-called thrilling anecdotes and strange events in Tibet, and uses a sensational language to wantonly misrepresent the appearance of the Tibetan region and defame the image of our Tibetan compatriots—while at the same time giving vent to the writer's despicable pursuit of sex and money. The content is filthy and the style is poor in this so-called 'exploratory' work. (ibid)

The use of a first-person narrator to mediate stories and impressions from Tibet to the readers of *Renmin Wenxue* certainly gave 'Liangchu nide Shetai' the appearance of a work of exploration rather than fiction; and by this token, it seems also reasonable to conclude that 'the style is poor.' The work, however, was published as fiction—only fiction that was clearly influenced by personal 'exploration,' but not necessarily accountable, in an academic sense, for the observations recorded. Adding to the irony, Ma Jian was himself primarily offended by the discrediting of his exploratory 'observations,' rather than any of the other charges launched at him. While the issue of 'truth' or 'falsity' in 'Liangchu nide Shetai' will be resumed in Chapter Nine in the context of international cultural politics, suffice here to say that the very stylistic breach on the national forms perpetrated by the use of the first-person pronoun might have been the key issue at hand: the presentation of a 'subjective' narrative in a collective form seemed to question the basic structures of the Communist literary system. While Chapter Six will look more closely at the problems of ethnic representation in China in the 1980s, the next chapter focuses on this 'grey area' between fiction and travel writing—or as often devised in this context: between 'fabrication' (杜撰) and 'investigation' (觀察).

Chapter Five

The Narrator in Transit (Part One): Travel and Translation in the Post-Mao Era

The critical potential of the form of fictional travel writing that emerged on the mainland in the 1980s lies, at least in part, in its focus on the discursive tension in the PRC between what might broadly be termed 'emplacement' and 'displacement'—and particularly the ambiguous connotations of the latter throughout most of China's modern history.[1] While the positive potentials of 'travel' have often been appropriated by the CCP for pragmatic purposes, the dangers of individual mobility have continuously imposed a threatening presence upon the maintenance of social stability—a fact to which the imposition of the *hukou*-system in the 1950s,[2] for instance, bears sufficient witness. The threat of unrestricted individual mobility to the hegemony of political power can be defined, as Eric Leed has done in another context, as 'the fluidity of identity achieved through territorial mobility' (1991: 276). When fiction consumes these motives, and lets this 'fluidity' guide its narrative conventions, it might consequently turn out as politically suspect.

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[1] Portions of this chapter were presented as part of the panel 'Ideas in Transit,' at the conference Asian Diversity in a Global Context, Copenhagen University, November 11-13, 2010.

[2] The *hukou*-system—a civic registration system intended to curb individual mobility between rural and urban areas—was devised in 1951 and fully implemented in 1958 (Chan, K. 1996: 135-136; see also Nyíri 2010: 10-34). It can be seen as a system of social stratification based on place of birth, where urban areas constitute 'centres' (of affluence, social benefits, wealth, education), to which individuals from the rural 'periphery' are generally barred access, until they are needed for various services by the centre. Pál Nyíri writes that, '[a]rguably, […] the main function of the *hukou* system in China's major cities today—similar to the immigration systems of some Western countries—is not to keep unskilled migrants out but to keep them in a permanent position of legal and economic instability and vulnerability' (Nyíri 2010: 19).

As travel restrictions were loosened in the course of the Reforms and Opening and the rural population started to migrate towards the cities in numbers that were to exceed most other demographic displacements in modern history, urban writers, artists, critics, and random bohemians flocked in the opposite direction in search of hidden-away corners of the People's Republic that were still relatively untouched by the Maoist sterilisation of cultural life elsewhere. Yunnan re-emerged as a cultural getaway in the southwest as it had been during the War of Resistance, but particularly Tibet (which had not been formally incorporated in the Republic of China) emerged as one of the most favoured destinations. Yang Lian, Ma Yuan, Ma Jian and others not only sojourned in Lhasa or travelled the countryside, but also let their works be influenced heavily by the natural and spiritual 'otherness' of Tibet. Scattered all over the PRC were places that, although perhaps not as spectacular as the Tibetan Plateau, offered similar seclusions from the politicised public space in the urban centres. Gao Xingjian's post-exile novel *Lingshan* or Ma Jian's *Hong Chen* were born from these circumstances and have been carried across to international literary space to critical acclaim.

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, these narratives might be said to enter a discursive space between 'fiction' and 'nonfiction' (by employing formal features characteristic of both), and produce fractured narrative visions of the 'contact zones' (Pratt 2008) on the peripheries of cultural and territorial China. The metaphor of the journey is repeatedly mobilised to construct a link between the narrator and the persona of the travelling author, and evokes the trope of the 'necessary elsewhere.' The writers probably travelled most of the itineraries they describe; there is a clear sense of observation and recording of 'exotic detail' combined with personal and subjective ruminations, which obviously draws a link to various forms of travel writing and nonfiction. Despite this fact, these writings have often been labelled 'modernist' or 'avant-garde' by Chinese critics—both in the sense of resembling or 'appropriating' stylistic features associable to other 'modernisms' and in the sense employed by the Chinese Communist Party: that of a pernicious influence from the 'West,' that ought to be eradicated as a form of 'spiritual pollution' or 'bourgeois liberalism.' The following will focus on this 'tension' between *investigation* and *fabrication* in modern Chinese literature—a tension that is amplified when the narrative keeps confronting the aspects of the 'national forms' still sensitive in the Communist literary system in the 1980s: national identity and narrative subjectivity.

Travel and writing in China

The literature of exploration in China can be traced back to the Warring States period (475-221 BC), in works of proto-geography such as the 'Yu Gong' 禹貢 [Tribute of Yu] or the *Shanhai Jing* 山海經 [The classic of mountains and seas).[3] While essentially professing a recording and investigation of the 'objective' world, these works appeared to progressively indulge the element of 'fiction' the farther away from the capital they moved, and they established a paradigm of a 'civilised centre' (that required concrete 'investigation' and factual representation) and an increasingly 'barbaric periphery' (where the element of barbarism was often exaggerated and 'fabricated' so as to more effectively set it off against the centre[4]). The combination of a 'historiographical and lyrical discourse' in the investigation and recording of an external world experienced through territorial passage was institutionalised by the rise of 'travel literature' (遊記文學) during the southern Song (1127-1279) (Strassberg 1994: 49); and Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1587-1641), travelling in the late Ming, managed to 'combine objective and subjective approaches to the writing of travel diaries,' by 'recording the details of his *physical* progress through a living landscape, along with his *metaphysical* search for the sublime' (Ward 2001: 97, italics mine).

From the late Qing onwards, travel writing about foreign countries increased dramatically. Social reformers like Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei produced narratives of travel in Europe and America that were overwhelmingly concerned with investigating foreign societies with the specific purpose of utilising these observations in China's modernization project.[5] The most noticeable change from Xu Xiake and his predecessors, and one that was to set the discursive standard for most of the twentieth century, was a purging of the experiencing subject, and the presentation of information as detached facts: 'I saw' had largely been substituted by 'there is.' A similar redefinition has been shown by Mary Louise Pratt to occur in European travel writing around the middle of the nineteenth century: a move from travel writing concerned with conveying

[3] The 'Yu Gong' was included in the *Shu Jing* 書經 [Book of documents], compiled in the early centuries AD but with contents dating back to the seventh century BC (Idema and Haft 1997: 76-77). It divided the country into nine different regions based on geographical characteristics and applied, probably as the earliest passed-down text in Chinese literary history, a systematised conceptualisation of a 'civilised centre' extending towards a progressively 'barbaric periphery.' A similar world view is expressed in *Shanhai Jing* (Ward 2001: 4), compiled sometime between the early third century BC and the earliest centuries AD (Birrell 1999: xxxix)

[4] Anne Birrell writes that 'the grotesque and ludicrous names for foreign parts' and the '[a]busive graphs representing the names of these countries and their peoples belong to an overall authorial strategy which aims to establish a line of demarcation between Chinese culture and that of others. The authorial viewpoint expressed is that of cultural hierarchy, with China enjoying a superior status' (Birrell 1999: xxix).

[5] Xiaofei Tian maintains that 'elite Chinese travellers made the West at once the target of intense scrutiny, analysis, probing, and distortion and the object of desire, admiration, contempt, and loathing' (Tian 2011: 158).

'*experience*' to one concerned with conveying '*information*' that was relevant primarily to the imperial agenda (Pratt 1994: 203).[6] In China from the late nineteenth century onwards it was another agenda, namely the reconstruction of China as a civilised nation among world powers, and the appropriation of 'New China' as the narrative subject in travel writing from this period onward has also caused the strong identification between travel and the genre of reportage. As Charles Laughlin has pointed out, 'modern Chinese travel literature is characterised by its writer's posture as a representative of and contributor to Chinese culture. In the process writers of travel literature, like writers of other kinds of reportage, manifest in their works a consciousness that is not primarily individual but cultural and collective' (Laughlin 2002: 44). This 'collective narrative subject' was adopted by the May Fourth generation, inasmuch as it inscribed a real socio-political purpose in the fictional narrative, and was taken by Mao as the foundation of all narrative.

Before the Sino-Japanese War made travel and internal displacement almost a necessity for literary production, Ai Wu's 'drifting about' (飄泊) in southern Yunnan and present-day Myanmar in the late 1920s had provided important source material for much of his early production and played an essential part in his consecration in the Republican literary field. He published his first travel-inspired story 'Nanguo zhi Ye' in *Xiandai* in 1932, and went on to publish the first instalment of his famous collection of travel-based short stories *Nanxing Ji* in 1933. Ai initially supported Lu Xun's brand of critical realism—the potential of fiction to mobilise public support for social and political injustice—but he also saw travel and southern Yunnan as a condition for a particular kind of narrative. Yunnan had been a contact zone on the periphery of cultural and imperial China since 1382, when it was annexed by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and had served as a particular 'remote' destination, both culturally and politically, for well-known travel writers like Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) and Xu Xiake.[7]

In the original preface to *Nanxing Ji*, Ai Wu states his purposes for writing fiction based on personal investigation on his travels: 'At that moment I made up my mind to write out, as accurately as possible, *things I had seen, heard, and experienced personally*—all the tragedies of

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[6] Pratt puts it as: 'It is surely not a coincidence that the emissaries of the modern state most often position themselves as an invisible and passive eye looking out over a space, a conduit for information rather than a mediating agent. The reader is by their side, looking with them and not at them. These are not subjects who act in the name of the state – the state will act through them' (Pratt 1994: 208).

[7] Yang Shen, a renowned Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) poet, was banished to Yunnan by the court in 1524. During the thirty years he spent in this southern exile, he produced a number of travel writing, such as *Diancheng Ji* 滇程記 [Diary of a journey to Yunnan] (see Chang and Owen 2010: 43-46). Xu Xiake is one of the best-known travel writers of late imperial China, and unlike Yang, he travelled out of his own volition. He travelled to south-western China in 1636 and to Yunnan in 1638, where he spent almost two years (Ward 2001: 44).

the oppression and struggle of the small and weak—so as to be "Telling The World"[8] like those artists of American imperialism (Ai 2008: 4-5; my italics). Although the tenets of critical realism are clearly manifested in Ai reasoning, it is also clear from this passage that he attributes a particular quality to investigations carried out by himself: the 'fabrication' that ensues thus has an immediate referent in the 'real' world. Ai Wu's efforts in *Nanxing Ji* can thus be seen as an attempt at dissolving the generic boundaries between 'investigation' and 'fabrication' in literature by employing a narrative subject that is both 'collective' (that of critical/socialist realism) but conveying information and a narrative that is clearly based on personal exploration in the little-known borderlands to the southwest. In a postscript to a revised edition of the book from 1963, Ai explains:

> 《南行記》裡面的小說，可以說是在祖國的南方和亞洲的南部，飄泊時候，把親身經歷以及所見所聞的一些人和事，用小說的體裁，描寫出來，而且採取第一人稱的形式。有些是用第三人稱形式寫的，因為不合「記」的體例，就仍然留在別的小說集內。
> You might say that the stories [*xiaoshuo*] in *Nanxing Ji* use the fictional form to describe my first-hand experiences as well as people and events I encountered when I was drifting around the southern parts of the motherland and southern Asia; in addition, it adopts the first-person [narrative] form. In some [stories] I had used the third-person, but since they did not conform to the style of the 'record' [*ji*], they were included in other collections instead. (Ai 2008: 116)

While the application of this 'internalisation' of travel was still relatively ambiguous in the fractured literary field of the 1930s, it found a more concrete application in the first 'sequel' to *Nanxing Ji* form 1964, *Nanxing Ji Xubian* 南行記續編 [Sequel to record of travels in the south]. In the preface to this work, Ai Wu relates a trip to Southern Yunnan that he made with select members of the Writers' Association in 1961. By this time he was no longer a lone drifter, but a respectable member of the literary establishment. He marvelled at the progress effected by the CCP in their 'liberation' of the peripheral areas he used to travel in the 1920s; what was once uncivilised borderlands guided by oppressors was now a world marked by the signs of progress and civilisation—realised, among other state-sponsored initiatives, by the Great Leap Forward (大躍進; 1958-1960). It is not easy to distinguish the narrators of the short stories in this collection from the

[8] 'Telling The World' is the title of an American movie that Ai Wu describes having watched while in Yangon in the late 1920s. In it two American lovers are unlawfully imprisoned while in China during the Republican revolution, but are rescued in the end by the American army. At the moment of their rescue, everyone in the cinema—Europeans, Burmese, Indians and Chinese—rose from their seats, and applauded enthusiastically. This, he writes, made him realise the potentials of the fictional narrative: that even when it issued from within the discourse of American imperialism, it absorbs the spectator to feel sympathy for the characters (which, in turn, might lead to sympathy for the cause). Ai Wu's intention with his own fiction was of course to reverse this relationship.

one in the preface. The first-person narrator in 'Yeniu Zhai' 野牛寨 [Buffalo stockade] (dated 1962), for instance, is travelling in southern Yunnan, and like Ai Wu, is inspecting local conditions and reliving memories from his travels in the late 1920s. In a place called Yeniu Zhai, he encounters the industrious local director, a woman he senses he has met before—back when he had stayed in the Kachin Hills (克欽山), a short distance across the border to Myanmar. He later discovers that it is in fact her sister, but it leads him into reminiscing about the original encounter—a story, essentially, about 'model workers' and 'evil landlords,' of which the two women (of the Jingpo nationality) fit remarkably the stereotype of the former. This 'double' travel narrative does not shy away from praising the merits of the Great Leap Forward and similar proletarian triumphs, and continuously contrasts the glories of the 'new world' (新世界) with the horrors of the 'old' (舊世界). The narrative is decisively unambiguous and is firmly located in the identity of Ai Wu—no longer an independent traveller as in the 1920s, but a writer of stature, member of China's Writers Association. In the preface, he writes:

> 有時也的確感到有些為難，甚至有些心驚膽顫；但為了擴大眼界，深入了解我們祖國的邊疆，搜集豐富動人的寫作材料，心情一直是愉快的。
> Occasionally I actually found it to be quite bothersome [to travel around southern Yunnan], and even somewhat unsettling; what never managed to cool my high spirits, however, were the prospects of expanding one's world outlook, the deep penetration into an understanding of our motherland's frontier regions, and the gathering of rich and moving source material for my works (Ai 1964: 3-4).

It is clear that not only are the hardships of the journey essential in order to achieve a 'deep penetration into an understanding of our motherland's frontier regions,' the journey in itself—and in particular journeys to these outlying areas—afford a specific 'transformation' in the narrative subject. This 'transformation in passage' furthermore carries connotations to political narratives that, by the time Ai Wu wrote this preface in the early 1960s, were approaching their rhetorical peak. These political narratives were founded upon a discursive link between 'territorial' and 'metaphorical' travel; a link that has found expression, specifically, in narratives of social transformation. The combination of territorial and metaphorical travel, for example, played a central role in the mythologizing of both the Republic of China and the PRC (and their synonymous political parties), by inscribing, respectively, the Northern Expedition (北伐)[9] and the Long March

[9] Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887-1975) led the Northern Expedition from Guangdong to the north between 1926 and 1928. It nominally put an end to the warlord regimes: unites the Republic (ROC) and legitimises KMT leadership.

(長征)[10] as central events in their political histories. Both these events are mythologized as territorial and metaphorical movements that proved definitive in the military and political struggles at their times. There is a specific collective element to both and they function as metaphors of unity and alliance: a process from a state of 'chaos' to a state of 'consolidation'—broadly defined.

This discursive understanding of 'movement'—from chaos to consolidation, or: from an undesirable to a desirable state of affairs through means of territorial passage—has in turn found a powerful rhetorical purpose in political discourses of social mobilization. The most wide-sweeping example of this case is no doubt the 'Down to the Countryside Movement,' which forcefully displaced millions so-called 'educated youths' (知識青年) from the cities to the state farms—far from the comforts of urban life—between 1968 and 1978 (Larry 1999: 35-42). This 'movement' (運動) was a form of government-stipulated travel ideally intended to transfer the traveller from one 'class consciousness' to another, and built upon an idea that had been practiced by changing governments in China for something like two millennia in the handling of 'out-of-line officials' or other undesirable social elements: namely, deportation to an 'internal exile' on the far peripheries of the empire. Displacement of individuals from the political centre to the margins of the empire or nation-state was (except for the very useful purpose of getting rid of the critical voices at the capital, which might, in the final analysis, also have been the primary motivation for sending Red Guards out of the cities in the late 1960s), *ideally*, intended to effect a change in the individual's consciousness for the 'better'—or one in stricter compliance with that of the central administration. In these cases, the territorial peripheries appear to have been invested with a positive quality in the compliance of the individual with the metaphorical centre: territorial movement to the periphery equals a metaphorical movement to the centre.

Since the early 1980s, the forced displacements of the Down to the Countryside Movement have seen a considerable amount of representation in literature. Ah Cheng's 阿城 (b. 1949) fictionalisations of his experiences on a state farm in Yunnan were particularly well received in the 1980s; and the national bestseller in 2004, Jiang Rong's 姜戎 (b. 1946) *Lang Tuteng* 狼圖騰 [Wolf totem], depicted the writer's experiences of re-education in Inner Mongolia. These works obviously differ from the form of travel discussed by Ai Wu insofar as not being inspired by individual

[10] The Long March was a journey conducted by Mao, Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898-1976), and other figures later to achieve central positions in the PRC government, between 1934-1936. The move managed to evade the KMT forces imposing on the Jiangxi soviet, and consolidated the Communists and guerrillas at Yan'an. It has frequently been evoked to legitimise the eventual CCP leadership.

choice; but more significantly, and what essentially makes these kinds of narratives edible to CCP censors, is that although these individual accounts of re-education usually depart from their political purpose, they do not specifically abandon the 'collective' narrative subject-position evidenced by Ai Wu and delineated by Laughlin above. Many of the more radical aspects associated with the Cultural Revolution had by the early 1980s been blue-stamped for intellectual critique, and although the government-stipulated 'territorial' travel to the periphery may not have resulted in the intended 'metaphorical' travel, it was still within the bounds of the political discourse.

Writing between 'investigation' and 'fabrication' in the New Era

In the mid 1980s Tibet had become something of a hotspot for Chinese writers and artists disenfranchised with the crowds and political surveillance in the big cities and in search of radical difference and spiritual stimuli: not only was it as far away as possible from hands-on political repression in the capital as one could get without leaving the PRC completely, it was also a distinctly 'other' cultural and natural space that afforded a repository of 'exotic' curiosities and a spirituality seemingly handed down in uncontaminated form from times immemorial—which in itself posed a stark contrast to the violent ideological discontinuities experienced in the greater parts of China since the late Qing (1644-1911). While there were certainly elements of exoticism and more practical issues at stake in the move to rural and minority subject-matter, there was also a strong sense that 'cultural meaning' did not emanate from a self-sustaining centre (i.e. the CCP), but rather, as James Clifford puts it in the introduction to *Routes*, 'in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales. Stasis and purity are asserted—creatively and violently—*against* historical forces of movement and contamination' (1997: 7). As Ma Jian wrote in a postscript to the English translation of *Stick out your Tongue*:

> In 1985, after three years of running from the authorities in China, I finally headed for Tibet. At the time the Tibetan Plateau was the most distant and remote place that I could imagine. As my bus left the crowded plains of China and ascended to the clear heights of Tibet, I felt a sense of relief. I hoped that here at last I'd find a refuge from the soulless society that China had become. I wanted to *escape into a different landscape and culture* […]' (Ma J. 2007: 82; tr. Flora Drew, italics mine).

The urge to 'escape' to 'the most distant and remote place' in China was a sensible one; in many ways Tibet posed as Beijing or Shanghai's opposite: the 'clear heights' instead of the 'crowded plains,' spirituality instead of a 'soulless society,' 'refuge' instead of oppression or 'running from the authorities'—in other words, an altogether '*different landscape and culture*.' While Ma Jian and

others kept running, and ultimately ended up abroad, Ma Yuan stayed on in Tibet for seven years; and after June Fourth 1989, when other writers went into enforced or voluntary exile, Ma Yuan moved back to the east coast to assume a teaching position and apparently abandoned creative writing for the subsequent two and a half decades.[11]

In a number of works from the mid-1980s, Ma Yuan paraphrases the 'metaphorical passage' implied in the 'displacement' to the territorial peripheries in political discourse; but rather than having this result in a 'metaphorical' movement to the centre, it radically decentres the subject position of the narrator, placing it in a constant state of tension or 'transit' between objective positions. The majority of his works set on the Tibetan Plateau somehow fall between the type of experimental fiction that made his name and what appears like random travel sketches—not radically dissimilar to what Gao Xingjian did in *Lingshan*. The concept of 'fabrication' is in Ma's fiction continuously played up against the seemingly antithetic idea of 'investigation'—stressing fact-based knowledge rather than deductive speculation or fancy. It is in this respect that Tibet, as both a location and condition of writing, emerges as a crucial component.

The function of Tibet as imperial and imaginary 'outpost' in the 1980s can in this sense be seen as invoking the function of Yunnan in Ai Wu's early travel-infused writing: a periphery defined against the certainties of a centre. In 1983, Ai published the third instalment to his records of southern travels, *Nanxing Ji Xinpian* 南行記新篇 [New chapters to records of travels in the south], appearing more than half a century after his initial travels. In the preface he writes:

> 年輕時候，對異地的風光人物，有極大的歡喜。回顧幾年的創作歷程，大都是把年輕時代儲存的印象和激情的感受，作為涓涓不息的泉源。[…] 邊地風光，到處涌現。年輕時候熱愛生活的心情，又像瘋狂似地席卷了我。一個從事創作的人，最怕對生活的冷淡，什麼都引不起興趣；或者到了生活中，視而不見，聽而不聞。
> When I was young, I was extremely fond of the people and scenery in unknown places [*yidi*], and when I look back on the course of my many years of writing, the majority [of my works] have drawn on an inexhaustible source of the stock of impressions and experiences stored up in my youth. […] The borderland scenery appears everywhere. The lust for life I felt in my youth also seemed to madly engulf me. What someone engaged in creative writing fears the most is to feel an indifference towards life and that nothing can arouse one's interest; or, in life, to look but not to see, to listen but not to hear. (Ai 1983: 2)

Here Ai Wu clearly indicates the potential of travel and 'unknown places' to not only stir the imagination but to enhance sight and insight. In a similar vein, Ma Yuan often employs the

[11] In 2012 Ma Yuan published *Niugui Sheshen* 牛鬼蛇神 [Monsters and demons], his first work of fiction in over two decades.

metaphor of 'oxygen' to express a fundamental socio-cultural chasm between Tibet and China, but he also sometimes draws on this metaphor to indicate a form of 'creative oxygen,' which is seen as essential to his particular brand of 'fabrication'—as for instance in this passage from 2001, relating the writer's experience with Tibet, in a discourse reminiscent of Ai Wu's:

> 那時候我被寵受到了幾點。隨心所欲不逾矩是七十歲的境界，我何以三十歲上便心手如影隨形呵。上天待我不薄，也讓我忘乎所以，讓我太無節制地濫用個人稟賦。實在西藏太過豐饒，因而給了我太多錯覺。我以為那是我的專屬，是我的私家花園可以取之不僅用之不竭的。[…]
>
> 剛進藏的時候，突出的感覺是缺氧。離開西藏，時間越久越是覺到——怎麼說呢，也是——缺氧。
>
> At the time I was extremely privileged. To follow one's heart's desire and not stray from one's path is the predicament of the age of seventy [according to the Analects, 4:2]; how, then, could it be that, when I had merely passed thirty, my hand already followed my mind like shadow follows form. The ascent into the heavens had no small effect on me [*shangtian dai wo bubao*], it also allowed me to forget myself and to uncontrollably indulge my individual endowments. In fact Tibet is far too abundant and accordingly gave me too many false impressions [*cuojue*]. I came to think that it was exclusively mine—my own private garden with inexhaustible resources. […]
>
> When I had just entered Tibet for the first time, the overpowering impression was that of a lack of oxygen. But when I left Tibet, and as time gradually passed by, I experienced—how should I put it—also a lack of oxygen (Ma Y. 2002: 4).[12]

Like Ai Wu, the deliberate displacement to the political peripheries is seen as essential to writing. However, whereas the metaphorical passage undergone by Ai Wu—the writer *and* the narrator—joins forces with the political purpose, and to a certain degree manifests the writer's compliance with the political centre, the passage undergone by Ma Yuan seems to afford an opposite movement. The decentring of the narrative subject that occurs in Ma Yuan, however, is in the same way founded upon the explicit link between the writer and the narrator—a decentring that comes to show, for instance, when the above quotation, ostensibly uttered by the 'real' writer Ma Yuan, is compared to a similar statement by the narrator 'Ma Yuan,' at the beginning of the story 'Xugou' 虛構 [Fabrication], from 1993:

> 有人說我是為了寫小說到西藏去的。我現在不想在這裡討論這種說法是否確切。我到西藏是個事實。另外一些事實是我寫了十幾萬字有關西藏的小說。用漢字漢語。我到西藏好像有許多時間了，我不會講一句那裡的話；我講的只是那裡的人，講那裡的環境，講那個環境裡可能有的故事。細心的讀者不會不發現我用了一個模稜兩可的漢語詞匯，可能。我想這一部分讀者也許

[12] Ma Yuan has elaborated this position on a number of occasions. In an interview with *Xin shiji zhoukan* 新世紀週刊 [New century weekly] from 2006, he stated that, '[h]ad I not gone to Tibet, my works would probably have been completely different […] Tibet made manifest my formally highly individualized tendencies, and what I wrote was henceforth enlivened and ignited. Tibet is an unusual place; it can provide you with imaginative power and a unique perspective and mindset. No place can compare to Tibet' (Xu M. 2006: 90).

> 不會發現我為什麼沒用另外一個漢語動詞，發生。我在別人用發生的位置上，用了一個單音漢語詞，有。
> Some say I went to Tibet for the sake of my writing. This is not the place to discuss the truth or falsity of such an assertion. That I *have* been to Tibet is a fact. And it's also a fact is that I have written tens of millions of words about Tibet, all in the language of the Han people, in other words, Chinese. It is true I was in Tibet for a long time, without learning a single word of their language. What I have been talking about is the people there, the environment, and stories that might be in that setting. A careful reader will notice that I have used the word 'might.' I think such readers might not notice that I did not use the word 'occur.' Where others use 'take place,' 'occur,' I use the verb 'be.' (Ma Y. 1986: 49; tr. J. Q. Sun, Ma Y. 1993: 101-102)

The deliberate merging of narrative and authorial identities, and the relationship that arises between territorial and metaphorical passage, only achieves its full effect when considered in the light of the political discourse—and particularly the relationship between this discourse and literary narratives in China throughout most of the twentieth century. As has been argued, the rhetorical power of the discourse of realism in China has been specifically connected to the idea of a collective narrative subject. This collective subject, in turn, has been sustained by an idea of the 'truthfulness' in fiction, implying that although literary fiction is a form of 'fabrication' it is also rooted in an objective world, approachable through travel and 'investigation.' Ma Yuan can in this sense be seen as subverting the discursive understanding of movement and travel in the PRC. Where displacement to the peripheries leads to the ideological centre in political discourse (symbolising a process from chaos to consolidation) Ma Yuan can be seen as un-making the consolidated narrative subject and throwing it into a state of chaos and uncertainties by replacing the political predicament of travel with a form of continuous transit—approaching a state also sought by Gao Xingjian's narrator in *Lingshan*: 'So not having a goal is a goal, the act of searching itself turns into a sort of goal, and the object of the search is irrelevant. Moreover, life itself is without goals, and is simply travelling along like this' (Gao 2000a: 327; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2001b: 342). These uncertainties become particularly vivid through the appropriation of the travel-based narrative—a particularly truthful form of narration—and ends up somewhere in-between the 'factual' and the 'fictional' narrative.

At the beginning of 'Xugou,' for example, the narrator identifies himself as 'the person known as Ma Yuan, a Han Chinese,' and 'a writer' (Ma Y. 1986: 49; 1993: 101); and a few passages down: 'In fact, there isn't an essential difference between me and other writers. Like them I must observe life [觀察], and then create fabrications [杜撰] based on the things I've observed' (ibid; 1993: 102). The narrator discloses that the following story will regard a seven-day stay he made in a leper colony called Maqu village somewhere in rural Tibet: 'What I simply wish to do is borrow this leper-filled village as the backdrop to my story, and weave a sensational story from the

observations [觀察] I made during those seven days' (1986: 49-50; 1993: 102). By this point the reader should probably have realised that the following story is fictional (a fabrication), but based on the narrator's ('Ma Yuan') personal experiences (investigation)—a statement the following narrative appears to sustain. After having roamed the leper colony as a travelling outsider for the vast majority of the work, observing and recording social life in the village, and in effect built the narrative to a climax, the first-person narrator suddenly admits that he has actually never been to a leper colony, but rather 'fabricated' the story from hearsay and the reading of *Le Baiser au Lépreux* (1922; tr. *A Kiss to the Leper*, 1950) by François Mauriac and Graham Greene's *A Burnt-out Case* (1960)—works that both treat the issue of leprosy. This subversion of the narrative foundation is what initially struck critics as 'avant-garde'—the fact of the 'truthfulness' of the narrative being subverted by the split narrative subject and the exposure of essentially all narrative as 'fictional.'

A similar debunking of authorial integrity appears in 'Xihai de Wufan Chuan' 西海的無帆船 [Boat without sails on the western sea (e.g. Tibet and Qinghai)], Ma Yuan's first work to be published in the prestigious literary journal *Shouhuo* (No. 5, 1985). This novella relates a journey to Ngari (*Ali* 阿里) in western Tibet by the two stock characters (or pseudo-aliases) Lu Gao and Yao Liang, as well as four other people. It opens with a poem:

> 沒有人能說得清除
> 從什麼時候開始
> 西部
> 成了一種象徵
> 成了真實的存在
> 與虛構之間的一塊
> 誰也不稀罕的空白
> No one can really say for certain
> From when it began, that
> The western regions
> Turned into a symbol
> Turned into something in-between
> Actual existence and illusion;
> A marvellous fracture of blank space
> (Ma Y. 1985: 159)

The 'blank space' is an unpopulated place in western Tibet—the 'western regions.' It is also a symbol of the blank space between reality and illusion that the work set out to explore: the necessary elsewhere at the boundaries of the national forms, where narrative 'in-between' is rendered possible by the physical and imaginary displacement. In this novella, narrative perspectives are interchangeable (between you, me, and him) and storylines intertwine; it is

obviously a narrative of travel and exploration far beyond the reach of socialist civilisation, rich with descriptions of natural scenery and 'local colour.' At a point near the end of the work, however, the reader is faced with the following passages, narrated presumably by the character Yao Liang:

> （小點透露給你們一點內幕陸高就是馬原本人。是個為自己塗脂抹粉的傢伙。）
>
> 馬先生本人從未到過西部無人區，我可以作死證。所有的細節都是不確實的。因此，他在小說形式上大耍花樣，故意搞得撲朔迷離以造成效果，使讀者部頒真偽。請推敲一下：
>
> 人稱。你我他三種稱謂走馬燈似的轉着圈運動，不停變幻視點，用以擾亂讀者思維的連貫性。
>
> (I will quietly reveal a piece of inside information to you all: Lu Gao is none other than Ma Yuan himself—a prop to make his own persona seem appealing).
>
> […] Mr. Ma has never been to the unpopulated areas in the western regions, I'll swear to that on my life. None of the details are accurate, and because of this he fools around with the fictional form and deliberately makes it blurred and confusing in order to achieve an effect—leaving the reader unable to distinguish fact from fiction. Consider this for a moment:
>
> Narrative perspective [*rencheng*]: the different pronouns of you, me, and him move around in a circle like a carousel, and relentlessly *alter the point of view* so as to disturb the coherence of the reader's thoughts […]. (Ma Y. 1985: 194, my italics)

The middle paragraph objects, like the one in 'Xugou,' to the 'truthfulness' of the main bulk of the narrative: not only is the legitimate coupling of experience and writing dismantled by the claim that 'Mr. Ma has never been to the unpopulated areas in the western regions,' but this claim is put forth by a supposedly fictional character; and at the beginning of the following chapter: 'To tell the truth, Yao Liang is not far off the mark; I have never been to the unpopulated areas […]. But I am not Lu Gao—that seems to go without saying' (ibid: 195). This incessant exchangeability of 'points of view' seems not only set to disrupt the credibility of the 'investigatory' narrative, but also to betray an intense desire for continuous movement—unable to stop turning the narrative 'visions' against each other. Whether or not the relentless displacement of narrative subjectivities should be seen as a symptom of the relative loosening of the rigid principles guiding the *national forms* particularly during the later years of the Cultural Revolution, and an expression of an urge to break free from the fixtures of the literary system, it turns out, in the final analysis, as a narrative about these very *forms* and about the inherent limitations of the Communist literary system.

The disturbance of 'the coherence of the reader's thoughts' incurred by interchangeable narrative perspectives and storylines is also one of the most obvious formal features of Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan*; and like Ma Yuan, these gain structure through their incorporation into the narrative framework of the journey. In *Lingshan* there occurs a similar intervention in the narrative:

> 「這不是一部小說！」

[…]

「故事不管怎麼講，總還得有個主人公吧？一個長篇好歹得有幾個主要人物，你這——？」

「書中的我，你，她和他，難道不是人物嗎？」他問。

「不過是不同的人稱擺了，變換一下敘述的角度，這代替不了對人物形象的刻畫。你這些人稱，就算是人物吧，沒有一個有鮮明的形象，連描寫都談不上。」

他說他不是畫肖像畫。

「對，小說不是繪畫，是語言的藝術。可你以為你這些人稱之間耍耍貧嘴就能代替人物性格的塑造？」

他說他也不想去塑造什麼人物性格，他還不知道他自己有沒有性格。

'This isn't a novel!'

[…]

'No matter how you tell a story, there must be a protagonist. In a long work of fiction there must be several important characters, but this work of yours …?'

'But surely the I, you, she and he in the book are characters?' he asks.

'These are just different pronouns to change the point of view of the narrative. This can't replace the portrayal of characters. These pronouns of yours, even if they are characters, don't have clear images they're hardly described at all.'

He says he isn't painting portraits.

'Right, fiction isn't painting, it is art in language. Do you really think the petulant exchanges between these pronouns can replace the creation of the personalities of the characters?'

He says he doesn't want to create the personalities of the characters, and what's more he doesn't know if he himself has a personality.

(Gao 2000a: 433-434; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2001b: 452-453)

The statement, that 'he doesn't know if he himself has a personality,' seems specifically to communicate Gao's discomfort with the rules not only of fiction but of all narration.[13] Unlike 'Xihai de Wufan Chuan,' the narrative perspectives in *Lingshan* appear to travel independently. In Ma's novella, the narrative 'visions' seem to be situated within the same ontological distance from its object (framed by the outing to the 'western regions'); for Gao Xingjian, however, not only does the journey proceed in multiple directions the pronouns might be seen to point to different 'levels' of consciousness. This leads Jessica Yeung to define three levels of 'reality' in the narrative structure of Gao's novel: a 'basic level,' loosely based on the writer's own travels around China's hinterland, and evident in the observations made by the travelling 'I;' a second level of spiritual travel, where 'mental and psychological experience is taken to be as "real" as, if not more so than, "external" experience' (Yeung 2008: 84); as well as a third, 'meta-narrative,' level, which might be discerned in Ma's text as well, that generates, as by synthesis, a visual position outside the narrative

[13] Elsewhere, Gao argues that '*Soul Mountain* uses pronouns instead of characters, psychological perceptions instead of plot, and changing emotions to modulate the style. The telling of stories is unintended, and they are told at random. It is a novel similar to a travel diary, and also resembles a soliloquy. Should critics not acknowledge it as fiction, it is fiction by virtue of their negating it' (Gao 1996: 176; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2007b: 94). On Gao's use of personal pronouns as 'characters' in his fictional writing, see Lee, M 2001 or Xu, G 2002.

structure itself. The first level in Yeung's analysis, is what frames these two works in the same way as Ma Jian's 'Liangchu nide Shetai'—as recounted at the end of the previous chapter—as an 'exploratory' work; and as seen in the case of Ai Wu, this was a national form that essentially sustained the system as long as it maintained a certain correspondence between the narrated object and things that were 'seen, heard, and experienced personally.' The challenge to this form naturally occurs in its juxtaposition with the fictional level—also in itself an acceptable form, but in terms of its integration with the former it should, again in the words of Ai Wu, be 'as accurately as possible.' As seen in the case of 'Liangchu nide Shetai,' perceived misrepresentation in a 'so-called "exploratory" work' might incur severe measures from the GAPP and lead to nation-wide political campaigns to restrict similar initiatives. While fluctuations between these forms might give rise to a 'narrative transit,' the 'exilic vision' is only properly realised the moment the text becomes self-reflective and a third 'point of view,' distanced from the other positions, is able to 'see clearly'—from a necessary *elsewhere*—the very structures that sustain the system.

The 'escape' across various outskirts of China depicted in *Lingshan* is turned into an 'escape' from the suffocations of the collective narrative subject. In this sense Gao Xingjian's narrator, as well as Ma Yuan's, can be said to lack a 'personality'—or, clearly, they have transgressed the framework for narrative subjectivity acceptable in the Communist literary system by not taking responsibility for the narrative 'I.' But at the same time, these narrative experiments are invariably inscribed by the *authorial* 'I;' as Ma Jian complained in a newspaper-piece in Hong Kong in 1987, 'the reason I do not want to write too much [travel writing] is that I do not want other people to see me too clearly; travel writing is like a diary, you cannot help but expose yourself' (Ma J. 1987a: 59). This 'exposure' is similarly evident in Ma Yuan and Gao Xingjian's texts above, only that it also works as a form of 'concealment,' by framing the observing 'I' in fiction and then displace both positions with the 'third,' meta-narrative, eye/'I:' the narrative displacement is invariably inscribed by bodily displacement, and the movement or 'transit' in the 'blank space' between positions comes to define the boundaries of the system in both physical and metaphysical terms.

The specific narrative referentiality in bodily movement can in this sense be linked to the 'visions in exile' constructed from positions in the counter-system, in political exile abroad, which in turn suggests a form of 'trajectory' from a conception of a *national* temporality (or centre) towards a *transnational*, or eventually *international*, temporality. In an interview from 2002, Yang Lian defined three levels of travel that he saw as essential to the creative process. The first level was the type of travel he made in the immediate wake of the Cultural Revolution in late 1970s and early

1980s. These journeys were partly spawned by the official revisionism of this period as well as an individual urge to experience 'real life'—especially in the 'far-away Chinese areas,' which brought a 'huge, deep energy' to his writing (Yang L. 2004). This level, again, might be seen as conventional in the context of the Communist literary system: the imperative of 'experiencing life' (體驗生活) was already a central component in the critical realism of the May Fourth generation and can be seen as running through the literary history of the PRC. As seen in the case of Ai Wu's *Nanxing Ji Xubian*, the Chinese Writers' Association frequently organised trips to rural areas to 'learn from real life,' and the practice of sending intellectuals 'down to the countryside,' both during the Cultural Revolution and earlier, was born from the same logic. The difference in the 1980s was the loosening of restrictions on individual travel, which generated a significant impetus for travel writing and investigative reporting from areas far from the capital.

Departing from this more straightforward materialist approach, Yang's second level addresses a cultural and ideological displacement from the 'fixed' social structure not only of communist society but also the traditional Confucian social structure. The energy to break away from these 'structures,' he reasons, could not come from the part of society he was already familiar with, but should come 'directly from nature and those far-away cultures, still not too destroyed by the political structure, like Tibet, Mongolia, […] Heilongjiang, Fujian, Guizhou, Sichuan;' places where he 'actually could touch the real world and touch a culture deeply linked with nature and the real life' (ibid). On this second level, Yang moves away from the dialectical materialism of the former and proposes a contradictory image of 'real life.' Here, Yang addresses the physical referent for the narrative transit; the clarity of vision is measured according to the distance from the cultural and political centres of the PRC. In this sense he implies, like Ma Yuan or others, that in the 'fixed structure' of centralised Chinese culture it is not possible to touch upon this 'real world;' one has to move as far away as possible from the centre in order for this opportunity to present itself. On this level, the 'other culture' becomes the only window to 'real life;' one that has preserved a grain of integrity amidst the destructions and mutilations effected by political culture. In fact, socialist civilisation is rendered 'other' in this argument—at least the 'other' of 'real life'—and thus, it seems, the actual 'fiction.' Despite the fact that Yang Lian's writing is often associated with the 'roots-seeking' phenomenon—as 'perhaps the first to express the need for Chinese literature to come to terms with China's cultural heritage' (Ying 2010: 159)—he, as well as Ma Yuan, Ma Jian, and Gao Xingjian can be seen as departing from Han Shaogong and others in that these are

movements that reach beyond the national subject: a search for 'something else' rather than some 'original' deep-seated layer of the collective cultural subconscious.

The third level of travel in Yang's optics is a 'return to oneself,' and seems to suggest exile as the basic condition for the poetic imagination: 'all those distances were "inner distances," all those journeys were the "inner journeys" that were making my own literary world bigger and richer.' In this sense, he regards his exile abroad after 1989 as a further displacement of his literary vision through the combined 'inner' and 'outer' movements: 'I can say that almost since 1989 I continued this "inner journey"' (Yang L. 2004). These journeys and subsequent narrative *transits* can in turn be read as metaphors for travels to, and ultimately across, the boundaries of the Communist literary system. While those who went 'across' (or as Gao Xingjian, had already *gone across* by the time of *Lingshan*'s publication), and came to be instrumental in the construction of an alternative position in Chinese literary space (the 'counter-system'), will be discussed in Part Three of this study, the only one of the above who only went to the boundaries of the system—and relentlessly continued searching these out but never crossed them—will be subjected to a closer reading in the following chapter. Ma Yuan's exilic vision was no less 'clear' than Gao Xingjian's in the 1980s; it only reverted to Beijing Time in 1989—when June Fourth effected a blockage of the dissemination of these 'exilic visions' within the mainland literary field—instead of progressing towards positioning in the counter-system.

Chapter Six

The Narrator in Transit (Part Two): Lure of the Gangdisi Mountains

As mentioned above, Ma Yuan was at the vanguard of the so-called 'modernist' fiction that emerged in China after Deng Xiaoping's reforms materialised in the mid-1980s.[1] Literary critic Wu Liang commented in 1987—in one of the emblematic statements that came to define criticism of Ma Yuan and other '*xianfeng*' writers at the time—that the purpose of Ma's fiction was 'not to narrate a […] *story*, but to *narrate* a […] story' (Wu 2008: 215), thus indicating a precedence of form over content. It was not so much *what* he was writing about, but *how* he was writing it. Presently, however, it will be argued that the 'what' played a much more significant role than Wu suggests. Wu Liang's comment should naturally be examined in the light of the powerful hegemony of realism in Chinese literary discourse, in effect since the late 1910s but exercised with particular vigour by the Communist administration since 1949. As discussed in Chapter Three, Mao Zedong regarded the 'truthfulness' of fiction (a form of utopian communist verisimilitude) as quintessential for political legitimacy—a position he enunciated with powerful rhetorical force in his iconic 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art' in 1942; and despite the widespread liberalisations in the 1980s it was no inconsequential task to tamper with the single most important document of PRC literary theory.

What separated Ma Yuan from the other *xianfeng* or 'avant-garde' writers at the time—Yu Hua, Su Tong 蘇童 (b. 1963), Ge Fei 格非 (b. 1964), etc.—was the centrality of *place*, as already

[1] A version of this chapter has been published separately in Gimpel et al. 2012 (forthcoming).

described in the previous chapter: much more than the part of his authorship set in the revolutionary period and eastern China, his works set in contemporary Tibet are inscribed with a continuous dialogical attention to national identity, and by implication: the 'national forms.' In these works, the juxtaposition of Chinese and Tibetan culture—as idealised images and as 'fictions'—is essential to the '*narration* of the story.' The formal displacement of the 'national forms,' that Wu Liang implies is what sets Ma Yuan apart from other writers, appears far more realised when framed by this juxtaposition. In cultural, literary, historical, and geographical terms, Tibet becomes a 'necessary elsewhere' that facilitates a displacement not only of the 'national forms,' but the national subject itself. When framed, furthermore, by the uneasy tension between 'investigation' and 'fabrication,' as seen in the previous chapter, these works test the boundaries of the Communist literary system while tacitly staying clear of direct affiliation with the counter-system.

The situated and constructed other

The distinct 'otherness' of Tibet, which sometimes leads Ma Yuan's narrator(s) to conceive of it as 'another kind of world' (另外一種世界), weaves itself into the fictional fabric through 'observational' techniques characteristic of non-fictional genres such as reportage, ethnography, travel writing—as sketched already in the previous chapter. The works are full of careful descriptions of natural scenery and cultural detail, often cast in the discourse of exploration, followed by theoretical discussions on the *difference* between Tibet and the rest of the Chinese mainland. A typical example of this descriptive discourse, might be illustrated by a passage close to the beginning of 'Lasa He de Nüshen' 拉薩河的女神 [Goddess of Lhasa River], published in *Xizang Wenxue* in 1984, cast in the laconic diction of a classical geographer:

> 讀者應該首先知道幾種簡單又很要緊的事實。拉薩東經九十一度，北京東經一百一十八度。[…]也就是說拉薩與北京時差晚兩小時左右。一種。第二種，海拔。空氣稀薄算第三。據傳，這裡空氣約相當與北京的百分之六十。空氣稀薄的好處是空氣明度好因而能見度好，拉薩的天空也就格外藍。比想像的要藍。但也有壞處。缺氧呼吸困難，所謂高山反應和高山病；心臟負擔過重。最後是氣候，高原地區氣候多變，這在故事裡要談。
>
> The reader should first be made acquainted with some simple yet essential facts [*shishi*]. Lhasa is 91 degrees eastward longitude; Beijing is 118 degrees eastward longitude; […] which is the same as saying that Lhasa is about two hours behind Beijing Time. This is the first point. The second point is altitude. The thin air should be the third; it is said that the air here is about 60 per cent of that in Beijing. The advantage of the thin air is that transparency is good, which consequently makes visibility good; the sky in Lhasa is therefore extraordinarily blue—bluer that you could imagine. But there are also disadvantages, what is called altitude sickness or acute mountain sickness; the pressure

> on the heart is severe. Finally there is the weather; the weather on the plateau is ever changing. This will be discussed in the story. (Ma Y. 2002: 77-78)

This 'framing' of *difference* through the listing of 'essential facts,' however, serves a double purpose: not only does it create a fundamental rift between the observing travelling subject and the 'other' geography, it also generates a discursive space of displacement where 'visibility is good.' Although the reference to Beijing Time is most likely generic, it could also be made to point to the issue of literary temporality as it has been applied in previous chapters. Ma Yuan obviously makes the reference in order to underscore the geographic *distance* and dissimilarity between Lhasa and Beijing, which then subsequently might be made to serve issues of cultural and social alienation; however, it might also signal a distancing from the Beijing-sanctioned literary temporality: by beginning the story with the listing of 'facts' (事實), which are then expanded upon and ultimately questioned or overturned later on in the work, the narrator presents the thin air of the Tibetan Plateau as a desirable alternative to the 'thick' air and, one is lead to assume, *low visibility* in Beijing. Distance and displacement on the margins of the political boundaries of the PRC achieves the overall function of letting the narrator *see*—to acquire an alternative frame of vision through which to direct the narrative perspective.

'Gangdisi de Youhuo' 剛底斯的誘惑 [Lure of the Gangdisi], published in *Shanghai Wenxue* in early 1985, is probably the work in Ma Yuan's oeuvre that most clearly illustrates these issues. The novella (or 'medium-length novel') has been characterized as 'a milestone marking the rise of avant-garde fiction in China' (Zhao 1995: 312), and stands as central in Ma Yuan's oeuvre.[2] The plot line seems deliberately incoherent: one storyline breaks off and leads into another and is then resumed at a later point or abandoned altogether.[3] Although the plot appears initially to proceed randomly along these different routes, it gradually becomes clear that they are loosely stitched together around two Han Chinese characters named Lu Gao and Yao Liang, who have also been 'lured' onto the Plateau by expectations of the extraordinary and exotic. Characters bearing these names had appeared already in Ma Yuan's debut work from 1982, 'Haibian ye shi yige Shijie' 海邊

[2] Despite the fact that the work is considered representative of the emerging avant-garde, Ma has at least on one occasion attempted to minimise its significance as 'something he just jotted down' and inferior to other works in his production (Ma Y. 2009: 286).

[3] In Herbert J. Batt's English translation of the work, 'Under the Spell of the Gangtise Mountains' (Ma Y. 2003), these fragmented parts have been rearranged so that they appear cohesively as individual stories. This act of extraordinary textual violence is presumably meant to serve a domesticating purpose, but in fact deserves sustained attention due to the very severity of its appropriating measures.

也是一個世界 [There is another world by the sea], and would reappear in several subsequent works, such as 'Xihai de Wufan Chuan' mentioned in the previous chapter. Although there is no reason to assume any continuity between these characters, they appear invariably in Ma's Tibetan works as Han Chinese settlers with shared past experiences; they generally seem to have spent quite some time in Tibet yet speak little or none of the local language.

Although intertwined in a labyrinthine plot structure, one can define at least four different 'minor' narratives in the work that are vaguely sustained by an authorial meta-narrative. One of these is a first-person narrative by a character known as the 'old writer' related in unmarked direct discourse to Lu Gao and Yao Liang and mainly based on his personal experiences during his thirty years' residence in Tibet (chapters 2 and 5). Another is a third-person omniscient voice relating the circumstances surrounding a trip made by Lu Gao and Yao Liang to a Tibetan sky burial (chapters 4, 8, and 10). It is, as such, the most conventional part of the work and showcases in a realistic tone the search for 'radical alterity' by tourism in China. Probably the most interesting episodes in the work, however, are related in the second person and concern a hunter named Qiongbu who lives in the Gangdisi Mountains (chapters 3, 6, and 7). The final storyline is the only one presented coherently (chapters 11-15), before two poems attributed to Lu Gao and Yao Liang respectively. In addition to this there is a compulsive urge for 'self-exposure' on the part of the 'meta-narrator,' which appears as intrusions into the text such as: 'Now I am going to tell a different story' (Ma Y. 2002: 20), as well as sections that appear as unmediated addresses by the author to the reader or perhaps himself: '(Another note from the author: In a work of fiction this kind of elaborate display of emotion is very annoying, but since it has already been uttered, the author himself is not inclined to remove it. This will not happen again.)' (ibid: 28-29).

The 'other' frame

The epigraph to 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' quotes Swedish Nobel laureate Selma Lagerlöf (1859-1940):[4] 'You are of course at liberty to believe it or not, as ought to be the case with all true hunting stories' (Ma Y. 2002: 11; Lagerlöf 1910: 143). The passage originally appears in *Gösta Berling's Saga* from 1891, in a chapter about an old one-eyed bear from Gurlita Cliff that troubles the local population and is hunted down by a certain Anders Fuchs. The epigraph sets the literary time

[4] In Batt's English translation this quote is mistakenly attributed to 'Lagerkvist' (Ma Y. 2003: 169).

(World Literary Time), and also sets the frame for what initially appears to be the main motif of 'Gangdisi de Youhuo'—bear hunting. In Lagerlöf's original the sentence appears after a long passage describing nature's fundamental hostility to human settlers on the peripheries, and how the wilds—the woods and mountains—are inherently inhospitable to civilised human beings. In 'Gangdisi,' however, it soon becomes clear that it is not a bear like the one in *Gösta Berlings Saga*, but rather the ever-elusive 'Wild Man' (野人)—or, as it is known around the Himalayas, the Snowman or Yeti.

The Himalayan Snowman, the narrator informs us at one point later in the story, belongs to the 'tales of the fantastic,' and although rumours of it have spread to several parts of the world, 'no reader believes in these fantastic anecdotes' (Ma Y. 2002: 37).

> 在世界各地相繼發現一些有關野人的線索，好多國家派出專門科學考察隊花費巨資考察都沒有見到死的或活的野人整體，所得都是些傳聞和支離破碎的所謂「物證」。
> Clues to the Wildman have been discovered in several parts of the world and many countries have dispatched specialised scientific investigation teams and spent large amounts of money on study, all without discovering either a live or a dead Wildman; what has been accomplished is a few rumours and fragmented so-called 'material evidence' (ibid.).

In the spring of 1985 Gao Xingjian's play *Yeren* 野人 [Wild man] premiered at the Beijing People's Art Theatre and, as the title indicates, it made use of a similar frame for addressing conflicts between nature and civilisation. In Gao's text, as in Ma Yuan's, modernity is defined against tradition in terms of the scientific verifiability of concrete facts—the so-called 'material evidence.' In Gao's play an ecologist is sent to a remote region along the Yangzi River to work for forest preservation but is immediately caught up in the local craze for the Wild Man. Eventually he is joined by Wild Man 'experts' and 'investigation teams' although without ever finding any factual evidence. At the end of the play, however, the Wild Man is seen playing with a child, thus indicating that the 'existence' of such a creature, although belonging to 'tales of the fantastic,' is able to materialise in the 'unspoiled' imagination of the adolescent. The link between the child and the Wild Man is not accidental; both are 'other' to scientific reason, and the trope of the Wild Man functions also in 'Gangdisi' as an exaggerated analogy to the hierarchical relationship between ethnic identities in the PRC. Issues of ethnic differentiation had become pronounced in the context of the New Era. The tactics of political domestication that had dominated minority representation in previous decades—discernible in the caption to a propaganda poster from 1976: 'Herdspeople love to read Marx and Lenin' (see Figure Three)—seemed to have yielded partially to an official narrative of multiculturalism. The void left by the relative abandonment of revolutionary rhetoric in

the post-Mao period gave rise to an apparently contradictory set of public narratives of cultural identity that, on the one hand, advocated the promotion of China as a multi-ethnic nation-state encompassing all the territorial claims made by the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and essentially rendering all the various minorities or 'nationalities' (少數民族) defined during the 'ethnic identification' project[5] in the 1950s and living within the political boundaries of the PRC as *Chinese* (Baranovitch 2010a). But on the other hand, both state-sponsored and popular media have been implicated in a seemingly deliberate exoticisation of the various ethnic groups on the peripheries of cultural and territorial China as radically 'other'—presumably in order to establish the majority Han as relatively modern, progressive, and civilized (Gladney 1994, 2004; Schein 2000).

Studies of 'national' (民族) identity in China have generally been approached from an anthropological perspective and have illustrated how, in order to sustain a narrative of a modern national identity after the devaluation of the revolutionary rhetoric associated with the Mao administration, it was essential for the state to oversee the portrayal of ethnic minorities living within the political borders of the PRC as embracing the party-state's civilising project, but also to accentuate the requirement for exactly this project. Dru Gladney in particular has emphasised that the representation of minorities in popular and state-sponsored media throughout the 1980s as 'ethnic others' (exotic, colourful outfits, traditional practices) played straight into the hands of the State's nationalist discourse insofar as it constructed the majority as homogeneous and modern and thus performed a critical function in 'influencing and constructing contemporary Chinese society and identity' (Gladney 1994: 94). This constructed homogeneity demands a stable subject position and a continuous reiteration of the discursive hierarchy between self and other.

Louisa Schein has called this mode of representation 'internal orientalism,' a term intended to denote a set of practices that occur *within* China but bear a resemblance to the discursive structuring of the Oriental other described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. Schein writes that, '[b]y the twentieth century, China's representation of internal others was implicated in a complex mimesis that both struggled with being the Orient to Europe's modernity and in turn echoed Europe's othering modalities in its own colonizing discourse.' This 'doubling,' Schein argues, correspond to 'the broad strokes of Said's theoretical intervention—the placing of the conjunction between power

[5] The 'ethnic identification' or 'classification' project (民族識別) was initiated in 1954 in order to differentiate and consequently *assimilate* ethnic communities living in the PRC according to Stalinist criteria (common language, economic base, psychological make-up, territory, etc.). The project resulted in the identification of 54 ethnic minorities by 1957 and the current number of 55 by 1979. See: Mullaney 2010.

and representation in the context of colonial relations of domination' (Schein 2000: 106). The term 'internal orientalism,' then, should not be understood as a parallel to the orientalism described by Said: 'It took place in an arena that was not spatially bifurcated and that was discursively cross-cut by imported modes of orientalist "knowledge" production, from Western anthropology to Soviet ethnology to transnational advertising' (ibid. 104). While China itself had served as the underprivileged other in Eurocentric discourse at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, a variety of politically engaged narratives throughout the twentieth century had constructed their own 'serviceable others.'[6]

At the same time as it was in the 'collective interest' to uphold the representational system that rendered the ethnic minorities 'as less evolved branches of people who need[ed] the moral and political guidance of the "Han" in order to ascend on the scales of civilization' (Dikötter 1996: 598), this system of representation also offered a set of preconfigured narratives that were essentially blue-stamped by the political leadership but ironically worked well in the project of displacing exactly this idea of a collective 'we.' The fact that this narrative frame was pretty much sanctioned by the Deng administration also allowed for a greater degree of movement within politically sensitive areas of cultural critique—such as the discursive constitution of the Tibetan other and the Han Chinese self, and the 'cultural chasm' between these two areas of the same state. Accordingly, from the mid-1980s onward there was a growing production of and public interest in fiction about Tibet (as well as other 'exotic' minority areas and peoples inside the PRC) and notably by authors who could claim some sort of ethnic affiliation with this imposing image of internal otherness (Schiaffini 2004: 91-93). One of the better known among these writers, at least to an English-speaking public, is probably the 'Chinese-Tibetan'[7] writer Alai 阿來 (b. 1959)—a writer who managed with great success to inscribe his own ethno-cultural 'hybridity' into his works, and thus allowed for a destabilisation of the narrative point of view in the pursuit of cultural selfhood and 'belonging' (Choy 2008; Yue 2008; Baranovitch 2010b).

[6] A 'serviceable other' is defined by Edward Sampson as 'others constructed so as to be of service to the dominant groups' own needs, values, interests and point of view. […] And so, if the self is to be rational, it is defined as such by virtue of considering all that is not-self (not-me) as lacking rational qualities. The female becomes the not-male; the "primitive" native, the non-European. Through this process, the other is made serviceable to the self, a creature constituted by the dominant self to represent what it is not, to be used and then discarded until it is needed once again' (Sampson 1993: 4-5).

[7] Alai's parents are allegedly Hui and Tibetan, see: Yue 2008: 550.

The initial theme in 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' is thus framed as a clash between civilisation and spirituality, the progressive and backward, that in popular wisdom supposedly constitutes the basic difference between China and Tibet in official PRC discourse. The character known only as the 'old writer' addresses this in specific terms in chapters 2 and 5. Based on a proposed expedition for the Wild Man, these chapters, in first-person unmarked direct speech, seem to revert Schein's 'internal orientalist' vision and might be taken to resemble the discourse found in contemporary 'cosmopolitan' travel writing.[8] The old writer's categories of analysis are largely informed by the idea of the 'civilising project' advocated by the Communist Party, but his long sojourn on the Tibetan plateau seems to have cooled his enthusiasm for revolutionary rhetoric and turned him into something of a 'cosmopolitan traveller:' sympathetic to the local culture and critical of the spiritual and material intrusion by the Han.

Writing and travelling at more or less the same time as Ma Yuan, Paul Theroux, for example, would describe the Tibetan capacity for resistance against the intrusion of Chinese settlers in terms of a form of 'spiritual continuity:' 'The whole of Buddhism prepared the Tibetans for cycles of destruction and rebirth: it is a religion that brilliantly teaches continuity. You can easily see the violence of the Chinese intention in Lhasa; but it was a failure because the Tibetans are indestructible' (Theroux 1988: 437). The same discourse of indestructibility and *continuity* is taken up by the old writer, the main difference from Theroux being that, after some thirty years on the plateau, he still cannot completely disown his 'roots' on the central plains: 'At the same time as my 1.8 million [Tibetan] compatriots entered socialism, at the same time as they entered science and civilisation, they still, in their idiosyncratic fashion, continued to live in their own mythological world [神話世界]' (Ma Y. 2002: 28). And further:

> 除了說他們本身的生活整個是一個神話時代，他們日常生活也是和神話傳奇密不可分的。神話不是他們生活的點綴，而是他們的生活自身，是他們存在的理由和基礎，他們因此是藏族而不是別的什麼。
> Not only do they [the Tibetans] live their life entirely in a mythological age [*shenhua shidai*], but their daily lives are also inseparable from myth and legend [*shenhua chuanqi*]. Myth is not an ornament of their life, but is their life in itself; it is the rationale and foundation of their existence, and it is because of this that they are Tibetan and not something else (ibid).

[8] Debbie Lisle defines a 'cosmopolitan vision' in contemporary travel writing that does not necessarily cancel out the traditional 'colonial' vision described by Schein and Said. Lisle writes: 'Romanticising the other is the flip side to colonial judgements: instead of reading the ignorance of others negatively, better to read it as an expression of ancient wisdom that has been lost in the modern world. In this case, others should be valued because they are closer to the mysteries of nature, spirituality and the universe' (Lisle 2006: 85).

While both Theroux and the old writer are clearly sympathetic to the Tibetans, they also deny them the capacity for change. Tibet appears locked within an ancient religious practice that not only prevents outsiders from penetrating 'their' world, but also apparently bars the Tibetans from entering 'modern' society.

While Theroux might seem relatively secure in his ethnocentric 'vision,' the old writer in Ma Yuan's story is conscious of his own perceptive limitations. He is invariably an outsider: 'Although I am able to speak Tibetan, capable of drinking butter tea, scooping tsamba, and drinking barley wine with my Tibetan compatriots, and even though my skin has been tanned so that it is dark-red like theirs, I am still not a local' (ibid: 27). He wants to understand them; wants to 'walk into that world of theirs' (28), but cannot enter. Despite intimate knowledge of society, culture, and custom, the cultural space rejects him: 'because I cannot *understand* life the same way that they do' (27; italics mine).

> 他們在其中理解的和體會到的我只能猜測，只能用理性和該死的邏輯法則去推斷，我們和他們——這裡的人們——最大限度的接近也不過如此。可是我們自以為聰明，以為他們蠢笨原始需要我們拯救開導。
> What they understand and experience among themselves I can only guess about; I am only able to use rationalism and goddamned logical measures to form my conclusions; us and them—the people here—even at the highest level of integration it amounts to no more than this. Nonetheless we consider ourselves intelligent and civilised, and consider them stupid and primitive and in need of our help and guidance (27-28).

On the one hand, then, the old writer is in opposition to the public and official narrative in the PRC insofar as he questions the rhetoric of progress and liberation—the *civilising project*—and in this sense rejects its 'serviceability' to the national identity; on the other hand, however, he is implicated by his very narrative in the production of new forms of power by 'translating' the exoticised other from a privileged position.

Staging otherness

The old writer goes on to vent his frustration on the tourism industry and explains that, when visitors arrive in Tibet for the first time, they marvel at the colourful way of life and ritual practice that abounds on the plateau and find everything 'fresh' (novel; strange: 新鮮); but in fact nothing is 'fresh'—it has been the same way for thousands of years. The reason outsiders find it thus is because

> 這裡的生活和他們自己的完全不一樣，他們在這裡見到了小時候在神話故事裡聽到的那些已經太遙遠的回憶。他們無法理解，然而他們覺得有趣，好像這裡是迪斯尼樂園中某個仿古的城堡。不是誰都能親眼看到回憶的。
> Life here is completely different from their own; in this place they meet those already too distant memories of myths [*shenhua gushi*] they heard when they were children. It is impossible for them to grasp, and consequently they find it intriguing—as if it were an imitation of an ancient castle in Disneyland. It is not everyone who can see [their] memories with their own eyes. (Ma Y. 2002: 27).

The old writer compares the average east coast Chinese tourist's impression of Tibet with the one they would experience in a replica Tang dynasty city in Xi'an. What these 'outsiders'—or, like Lu Gao and Yao Liang, the newly arrived—fail to grasp, however, appears to be the fact that, in the case of Xi'an, history is forced upon a contemporary condition: even though people wear Tang-style garments and live in Tang-style houses they continue to be 'modern people.' In other words, what is implied by the old writer is that in the case of Xi'an signifier and signified are separated by the gulf of history (the past and the present do not share the same ontological basis); to Tibetans, however, this gulf is absent—the 'past,' as he argued, is already part of the 'present.' While Chinese narratives of centralisation throughout the twentieth century, with peaks during the May Fourth movement (1919) and Cultural Revolution, we are led to understand, have repeatedly tried to sever metaphysical links to the past, Tibetan culture has managed to keep a sense of continuity despite accelerated modernisation.

The two relatively recent émigrés, Lu Gao and Yao Liang, venture on two occasions into the hinterland of Tibet in search of their own private Disneyland—one in order to witness the Tibetan sky burial, and the other, as mentioned, in search of the Himalayan Snowman. On neither occasion do they achieve their objective; nonetheless the reader is informed on two occasions that after this latter 'futile' expedition they both wrote books based on their experiences and that Lu Gao furthermore wrote 'an authentic story about a lyrical performer [說唱藝人]' (ibid: 43-44, 49). The sky burial is a radical manifestation of otherness and significantly easier to behold than a Yeti. It involves the dismemberment and partition of the corpse and its subsequent feeding to eagles and vultures. The birds devour all remnants of the deceased. The practice was banned in the PRC in the 1960s, but became tolerated again during the early 1980s. While being essentially off limits to outsiders, the quite grotesque spectacle of the ritual has become a somewhat absurd target for tourism.

The ceremony is initially related through a series of photographs scrutinized by Lu Gao on a previous occasion:

> 死去的人由親屬陪送到天葬台，由天葬師在曙色到來之前把死者肢解成碎塊（包括骨頭），然後點燃骨油引來鷹群；當第一線曦光照上山梁，死者已經由神應帶來上天庭了。這是莊嚴的再生儀式，是對未來的堅定信心，是生命的禮讚。
> The dead person is taken to the sky burial platform by relatives. Before dawn the Burial Master cuts the body into pieces [*zhijie cheng suikuai*] (including the bones); afterwards he ignites the bone oil to attract the eagles. As the first rays of dawn illuminate the mountain ridge, the deceased has already been carried to heaven by the divine eagles [*shenying*]. This is a solemn rite of rebirth, a staunch faith in the future; it is a celebration of life (ibid: 22-23).

The Tibetan sky burial is a recurring motif in several critical works of fiction, film and poetry in the mid-1980s, and it is clearly a symbol of the absolute margins of Chinese cultural influence. Several other writers of the same period have used the Tibetan sky burial in some way or other in, or as a pretext to their works. Ma Jian's 'Liangchu nide Shetai huo Kongkongdangdang,' for instance, provides almost identical imagery:

> 天葬師要把死者身上的肉全部刮下切成碎塊，在把骨頭用鐵錘敲成糊狀，如果年輕骨嫩的還要撒些青稞面，攪拌後讓鷲應吃掉。[…] 最後把死者頭皮交給親屬，天葬算是完成。
> The Burial Master hacks all the flesh from the corpse and slices it into small pieces [*guaxia qiecheng suikuai*]. He grinds the bones into a fine powder and adds some water to form a paste (if the bones are young and soft, he will thicken it with ground barley). He then feeds this paste, together with the flesh, to the surrounding hawks and vultures. […] When everything has been eaten, the master presents the scalp to the relatives, and the burial is considered to be complete (Ma J. 1987b: 99; tr. Flora Drew, Ma J. 2007: 2-3).

The 1986 film *Horse Thief* (盜馬賊) by Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壯壯 (b. 1952) similarly opened and ended with long shots of the Tibetan sky burial. Dru Gladney has remarked that these radical measures for establishing cultural alterity, as exemplified by Tian Zhuangzhuang, are designed to dig a vast trench between the majority self, the most likely consumer of the work, and the exoticised minority other: '[Tian's] purpose is that of alterity: by contrasting naturalized, primitive, and even barbaric minority life with the viewer's domesticated, modern, and civilized existences, Tian calls into question the very basis of that contrast' (Gladney 2004: 93).

In Ma Yuan's work Lu Gao vomits for two consecutive days after viewing the photos of the sky burial proceedings for the first time; the gore of the act of dismemberment and the abundance of intestines and body parts is a spectacle that not only constitutes a practice quite different from traditional Han Chinese funeral rites; it also conjures up vivid associations to violence or medieval capital punishment.[9] The associations to violence in the representation of the sky burial, however,

[9] While the practice of the sky burial as a *funeral rite* poses a distinct contrast to Han Chinese funeral tradition, its outward appearance is in fact not a far cry from ancient Chinese practices of penal mutilation; practices where the human body, according to the severity of the crime committed, was disfigured or dismembered to an extent virtually

are displaced and made part of the naturalized makeup of the exotic other; the actual implications of the event for the people involved, however, are not necessarily transferred to the exterior spectator. Soon after Lu Gao's sickness subsides, for instance, he begins to imagine his own bodily remnants being disposed of in a similar fashion; although nauseating as a mere visual spectacle, its symbolic significance appeals to him: 'It is not that he believes in the legends [傳說] of ascent into the heavens, it is rather that he enjoys this kind of magnificent imagery [想像]; this ceremony of abundant imagery leaves him captivated' (Ma Y. 2002: 23). Lu's vision represents the commoditisation of the exotic as well as the emerging 'ethno-tourism' available to Chinese urban residents after travel restrictions were loosened and general mobility encouraged during the Reforms and Opening. It is not only a funeral but also the 'Disneyland' outlined by the old writer.

Lu Gao is attracted to a local girl who is accidentally killed in a traffic accident in the week leading up to the date set by the Chinese 'explorers' for their trip to the burial site, and speculation ensues as to whether she might in fact be the one awaiting dismemberment by the Burial Master. Lu Gao's object of desire is brought together with his secret fantasy, the 'magnificent imagery' of the sky burial. The girl is to him a 'symbol,' which 'just like flowers, eagles, the ocean, and snow-clad mountains represents something spiritual'—it makes one 'experience the value and meaning of life' (ibid: 24-25).

In Ma Jian's far more controversial work 'Liangchu nide Shetai' it is also a young, beautiful, and sexually open girl who is 'buried' (formally married to a pair of brothers). The first-person narrator is similarly obsessed with the sky burial ceremony; several times already he has tried to witness a burial, but has failed in each attempt: 'it would either be finished by the time I'd arrived, or relatives of the deceased would spot me from afar and tell me to stay away. Sometimes they even threw stones at me' (Ma J. 1987b: 98; 2007: 2). When Ma Jian's narrator eventually gains access to the ceremony, however, he proceeds to eroticise the naked corpse of the girl: 'She looked as though she was asleep. I panned my camera down her body. Soft arms, palms upturned to the sky, a red mole under her breast, smooth thighs' (ibid: 102; 16). Ma Yuan's narrator too eroticises the ritualistic practice of dismemberment, although not quite to the point of necrophilia. Even though the 'explorers' never get close enough to the action to assert the actual identity of the corpse, the

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leading to the destruction of the human form. In addition to the element of torture, the practice was also intended to render the perpetrator unrecognisable even as a ghost in the afterlife, thus in effect damning the soul to eternal torment. A rather straight-forward method would be beheading, but more ingenious tactics, such 'death by a thousand cuts' (凌遲, 千刀萬剮, etc.), were applied in circumstances such as high treason or patricide. On the matter of these severe forms of mutilation, see: Brook et al. 2008.

miniscule possibility of it being the girl of his dreams excites Lu Gao immensely. The distance between the observer and observed is vast, and the sky burial fulfils its double purpose of 'uncivilised' feudalistic practice and exotic tourist site.

Lu Gao and Yao Liang are finally not allowed to approach the sky burial ceremony. At first their jeep is denied access by a Tibetan demanding an 'introduction letter from the Autonomous Region's public security bureau.' When Lu Gao pleads ignorance of any such letter, the other violently turns them away. 'Suddenly Lu Gao understood: they did not want people to watch, and they especially did not want outsiders to watch' (Ma Y. 2002: 44). Lu Gao nonetheless fails to reflect further on the question as to whether anyone, in any culture, would appreciate the presence of tour groups at the funeral of their relatives. Tibetan culture and tradition are available for consumption, not interpretation, by the Chinese tourist in the 1980s, and Ma Yuan's text emerges as a reproach to the Disneylandesque nature that the old writer attributes to Chinese tourism. The narrator even expresses slight disappointment with the show: 'The sky burial platform was not as they had envisioned, protruding on the top of a mountain; it was merely a big rock platform half way up the mountain' (ibid: 45).

Yang Lian's famous (or infamous[10]) poem 'Nuorilang' 諾日朗 [Norlang], originally published in 1983, also detaches the imagery of the Tibetan sky burial from its ritual implications, and mixes it with ancient sacrificial practices (the 'sun ritual') and allegedly 'sacred pilgrimage,' so as to stress 'the conjunction between history and present reality' (Yang L. 1985a: 162):

> 那麼，擦去你的悲哀！讓懸崖封閉群山的氣魄
> 兀鷹一次又一次俯衝，像一陣陣風暴，把眼眶啄空
> 苦難祭台上奔跑或撲倒的軀體同時怒放

[10] 'Nuorilang' is widely known to have been one of the primary targets in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign in 1983. The connection is even provided on the cover of *Yan dui Wo Shuo* 雁對我說 [A wild goose speaks to me]—a collection of Yang's prose, poetry, and essays jointly published by *Mingpao* in Hong Kong and the Youth Book Company in Singapore as part of the series 'Treasury of Contemporary World Chinese Literature' (世界當代華文文學精讀文庫): 'In 1983 [Yang Lian] caused a stir on the mainland poetry scene with the long poem "Nuorilang," and suffered criticism in the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign' (Yang L. 2010). The same passage appears verbatim in the author profile inside the book, which goes on to mention the subsequent introduction of his works to a world audience and ultimately June Fourth—because of which his 'works were banned on the mainland and he began his life in exile' (ibid: n.p.). Although the cover text stops short of linking Yang to the Tiananmen Incident, it seems feasible to assume that it is intended as a form of symbolic capital that appeals specifically to positions in the counter-system. Not unlike the reverse effect of the political denunciation of Ma Jian's 'Liangchu nide Shetai' during the campaign against bourgeois liberalism in early 1987, the fact of having been faulted by CCP literary critics for disregarding the collective interest and 'lock[ing] himself instead in an ivory tower of "pure poetry"' (Xiang 1985: 165, tr. Zhu Zhiyu), immediately evokes interest not only from the more politically inclined factions of the counter-system but from wider sectors of world literary space as well—insofar as the charge against Yang Lian's poem is exactly one of 'literary autonomy.'

> Now, let your grief wash away! Let the monster cliff block the challenge of mountain ranges
> and battering eagles dash in to peck the eyes until only empty sockets are left.
> Let bodies twisted or in repose on the sacrificial altar burst all at once into fierce bloom.
> (Yang L. 1985b: 160; tr. Tony Barnstone and Nathan Liu, Yang L. 1993: 57)

It is significant that while Yang's poem was politically denounced in 1983, so was Ma Jian's novella in 1987; but sandwiched between these two dates, 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' appears to have gone under the political radar despite applying a similar imagery and a similar appropriation of this imagery in the construction of the vision from 'elsewhere.' Obviously a variety of reasons might lie behind this situation—for one thing the imagery of the sky burial in itself might not even have been the issue that landed the works in trouble in the first place, and their denunciation might simply have been due to changing political climates. Underlying the criticisms of both Yang Lian and Ma Jian, as described above, were the contradiction—or at least *alleged* contradiction—of national forms, and it is possible that on a deeper level these two writers displayed more severe symptoms of 'spiritual pollution' or 'bourgeois liberalism' in the eyes of Communist censors than Ma Yuan did. In the case of 'Liangchu nide Shetai,' however, a partial approximation might be made through Ma Jian's travel novel *Hong Chen* 紅塵 (tr. by Flora Drew as *Red Dust*, 2001) from 2002 and its publication on the mainland under the name *Langji Zhongguo* 浪跡中國 [Wandering in China]—insofar as the scene of the sky burial was rehashed for this later work. As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, although the scene was reproduced almost identically in *Hong Chen* it was edited out completely from the mainland edition. It is furthermore clear from the awkward narrative discontinuity generated by the deletion of the passage (several pages), that the censors were particularly intent on the removal of any reference to the sky burial by 2002. Whether or not this was also the case fifteen years earlier is obviously difficult to say, although is does show some anxiety towards Tibetan ritual practice.

Whatever the reasons, it must also be noted that there exists a significant difference between Ma Yuan and Ma Jian's representation of the sky burial. The characters in 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' in fact never witness the ritual itself; the ritual proceedings quoted above are only suggested by some old photographs, presumably taken before Liberation, and when Lu Gao and Yao Liang attempt to witness it first hand they fail. Whereas it is a first-person narrator that provides a reportage-like description of the proceedings in 'Liangchu nide Shetai,' Ma Yuan's narrator 'omits' the direct representation of the burial while maintaining its presence in the text. Furthermore, while both cases seemed to involve young females, the girl in Ma Jian's novella is polygamous and adulterous while the one in Ma Yuan's is, in addition to her stark beauty, also an acculturated Han; in fact it might

not even be her hidden in the hemp sack spotted on the back of a truck on the way to the burial site. In contrast, Ma Jian's corpse is inscribed with various layers of 'primitive' social practice.

Just before their disappointed departure, Yao Liang manages to reflect on the solemnity of the ritual; and while never really approaching any comprehension of its implications—since this was probably never his intention in the first place—he seems to be able to draw a kind of parallel to a context with which he is familiar: 'This made Yao Liang think of the time one went to the graveyard; at such times even those usually very talkative women would keep quiet of their own accord' (Ma Y. 2002: 46). This had not only to do with respect for the deceased or the ritual in itself:

> 比如設想生命和死亡之間該有一條界；通常這界線在人們感覺中太飄忽，而到這種時候就具體了。肯定是人們到此便清晰地感覺到這條界，說句玩笑叫一腳門裡一腳門外，跨在界上。
> If one, for instance, supposes that there ought to be a boundary between life and death, that boundary is usually too diffuse in people's minds; however at times like these it becomes manifest. Certainly, when people come to a place like this, they clearly perceive this boundary. It might be called having one foot inside the door and one foot outside the door—straddling the boundary (ibid: 46).

This 'boundary,' however, is not only a boundary between life and death, but could, in this case, also be extended to the perceived boundaries between civilisation and nature, the modern and the primitive, the reality and fictionality that circumscribe Chinese and Tibetan cultures.

The rational savage

The second attempt by Lu Gao and Yao Liang to 'straddle the boundary,' is their expedition for the Wild Man with the old writer. In order to encounter this trope of the mystic and exotic—associated with the absolute margins of human civilisation—the three Chinese 'explorers' need to employ a guide. For this purpose the old writer chooses his friend of many years, the Tibetan hunter Qiongbu—the 'son of the mountain.' Qiongbu features as the main character in chapters 3, 6, and 7, relating some biographical information as well as the proceedings leading up to his first encounter with the Himalayan Snowman. These sections employ the second-person pronoun in the narration of the Tibetan hunter, sometimes in the purely objectifying narrative of a Chinese ethnographic observer and at others making the narrative appear 'internalised'—narrating the psychological processes of the hunter, sometimes in a language made to represent the subjective reasoning of a bear hunter from the Gangdisi Mountains and at other times utilizing a decidedly 'scientific' discourse to explain Qiongbu's motives. These sections showcase an attempt—or rather a highly stylized *flawed* attempt—to speak 'on behalf' of the other.

The narrative in these chapters constantly 'slips out of character' and exposes, on the one hand, a fractured narrative subjectivity—the 'narrator in transit'—and on the other, the instability of objectifying representation of the minority other within the referential framework available in the Communist literary system in the mid-1980s. The use of the second-person pronoun furthermore exaggerates the power relations and hierarchy of representation; it is clear that the owner of discourse is the majority subject, and the exotic object is, by virtue of its established otherness, made incapable of self-narration and must 'speak' in the registers of the dominating subject.

Qiongbu is from a lineage of famous hunters; he is at home in the untamed wilderness and enjoys a relationship of mutual respect with the animals in the mountains (a fact that makes him closer to animals than so-called civilised man): he only hunts the large predators and never touches the smaller animals. This representation is more or less in tune with the public narrative that renders Tibetan males potent and sturdy, but also valiant and noble—a 'macho minority' (Hillman and Henfry 2006: 258-260). 'You often encounter wild rabbits between the two mountain streams,' the narrator observes, 'but your rifle is always left reclining over your shoulder; you only knowingly blow a whistle in their direction' (Ma Y. 2002: 15). This part, as others, reproduces the mode of speech of the ethnographic observer, keen on having Qiongbu appear as a righteous hunter—the *noble savage*—with ideals rooted in nature: 'Of course you do not revel in the splendour of the highlands, you are a hunter of the Gangdisi Mountains—you are a son of the mountain' (ibid.). Even the possibility of a fast profit on musk does not motivate him to even consider breaking his pact with nature: 'It is not that you do not know that musk is very valuable, that it can be sold for a lot of money and exchanged for a lot of bullets; but how can it be that, when you watch that beautiful male river dear walk timidly close by you, you do not even touch your rifle?' (ibid). We are told that it is only the large predators that are of interest to Qiongbu: the brown bear, the snow leopard, and the lynx.

The representation of Qiongbu's internal reasoning (that which 'you' know) is filtered through a domesticating vision that silences the constructed other. In this instance the Tibetan hunter is able to conceive of musk's value only in terms of money's exchangeability for bullets—a currency presumably intelligible to 'a son of the mountain.' At other times, however, Qiongbu's internal reasoning is represented as adhering to the laws of science: 'The mountain slope ascends directly upwards, it appears as if the snow-covered mountain top is not at all very tall, as if it were just opposite and not very far away. But you know that this is merely due to the fact that the air is so thin in this place and visibility accordingly extraordinarily good' (ibid: 16). The thin air would, of

course, have no implication to a 'son of the mountain;' he would naturally be unaware of the fact that 'the air here is about 60 per cent of that in Beijing' and that visibility accordingly would be better than in a polluted metropolis in the lowlands.

This kind of 'slip' inscribes ambivalence in the representational code, which is taken further still when the narrator slides into a decisively literary discourse. It seems that the narrator is not really interested in the other as an *object* of representation, but rather in the act of representation itself:

> 我不說你獵熊的故事，有那麼多好作家講過獵熊的故事。美國人福克納，瑞典人拉格洛孚，還有一部寫獵熊老人的日本影片。可是村裡人，鄰村人都不會忘了你是怎樣制伏了那頭使百里震攝的山地之王。那是你一生最輝煌的時刻。那張熊皮你留下了，蓋滿你石砌的小屋整整一面牆壁。你不會忘了兩個伙伴給它拍成肉團，你不會忘了二十天追擊的疲憊和放鬆。我說了我不說你獵熊的故事。
>
> I am not going to tell the story of you hunting the bear; there are so many great writers that have told stories of bear hunting before. The American writer Faulkner, the Swedish writer Lagerlöf; there is also a Japanese movie about an old man who writes about hunting bears. But all the people in your village and in the neighbouring village cannot forget the way you subdued that mountain king that spread fear in the vicinity of a hundred *li*. That was the most glorious moment of your life. You saved that bear skin for yourself, it covers one of the walls in your small stone cottage completely. You cannot forget that it beat your two companions into bloody pulp; you cannot forget the exhaustion and restraint of the twenty days of pursuit and attack. I said I was not going to tell the story of you hunting the bear (ibid: 17).

In the first part of this paragraph the narrator exposes him- or herself as a writer of fiction, and one that is furthermore concerned with the originality of the work that he or she is producing. The narrative is still relating Qiongbu's story, but it is momentarily indecisive as to whether or not to proceed along the line of his hunting story. It then slips back into the descriptive mode, only to proceed to speak on behalf of the object of representation—relating that which 'you cannot forget'—until the point where the narrator seems to realise that, despite his/her intentions, he/she did in fact proceed along the line of the hunting story after all. It is clear that this indecisiveness in the narrative voice is intended to highlight its artificiality and thus formulate a critique of the false security of objectifying representation: while being seemingly in tune with the public and political narratives that render the Tibetan hunter a 'macho minority' in order to constitute the majority self as normative and civilised, the continuous slips in the narrative register turn the vision back on itself and highlight the inherent flaws in this type of cultural relativism.

Qiongbu is subsequently confronted by a series of seemingly contradictory accounts offered by a group of frightened herdsmen regarding a tall thin bear with long fingers that moves with immense speed on its hind legs and possesses extraordinary physical strength. It has been seen

tearing the head of a yak in two with its bare hands and, on one occasion, snatched the rifle from a petrified herdsman and snapped it like a dry twig. Qiongbu is not convinced by these accounts; naturally there could be no such bear. Everyone knows that bear paws are not suited to 'grabbing' things, and although it can stand on its hind legs, it certainly does not run in this posture. However, eventually the accounts spark his interest and he accepts the responsibility of confronting the mystical bear-like creature. As he sits alone in the disquieting stillness and awaits the bear, he is made to rationalise the creature on the basis of his presumed knowledge of the woods and mountains. Five witnesses have given similar accounts of the bear, yet none of them have suffered any injuries. Besides breaking a rifle, the creature also broke a large stick carried by the herder on another occasion. He asks himself whether it knows that these instruments might hurt it. And if that is the case, how come it did not avenge itself on the carriers of these instruments?

> 你初步肯定它不是熊。不是熊，那麼可能是什麼呢？這裡巨獸除了熊就只有虎了，而虎只有在岡底斯山脈東南麓的森林地帶才有；按他們說的不是熊也更不是虎呵。
> You begin to realise that this is not a bear. But if it is not a bear, then what else could it be? Of the large predators in this place, besides the bear there is only the tiger; but the tiger is only to be found in the woods at the south-eastern foot of the Gangdisi mountain range. If, according to their accounts, it could not be a bear, then it is even more unlikely that it is a tiger (Ma Y. 2002: 34).

Qiongbu resolves to stop speculating and instead 'seek truth from facts:' 'forget about it; I will just have to see it for myself—only then I will know what it is' (ibid: 35). This sudden display of rational interpretation by the exoticised hunter destabilises the 'credibility' of the representation of the 'macho minority.'

Qiongbu continues to rationalise:

> 它不想與人為敵，這是顯而易見的。那又為什麼襲擊與人相依而存的牲畜呢？只有一種解釋，它無法理解牲畜對人的從屬關係。你不懂生物鏈原理，但你知道只有人才擁有草場，擁有牛羊；你也知道這些它是不懂的。它襲擊牲畜和襲擊野獸一樣，都是為著它自身生存的需要。它分不出野獸和家畜，它不知道它因此成了人類的敵人。它是不願與人為敵的。也就是說它無意中對人造成了損害。
> It does not want to make an enemy of man. This is obvious. But then why does it attack livestock on which humans depend for their existence? There can only be one explanation: it has no ability to comprehend the necessity of livestock for humans. You do not understand the principles of the food chain, but you know that only humans possess pasturelands, possess oxen and sheep. You also know that it does not understand these things. It attacks livestock and wild beasts all the same; it is all to support its own existence. It cannot differentiate between wild beasts and livestock, and it does not know that because of this it becomes the enemy of humans. It does not want to be the enemy of humans; in other words, it has unintentionally caused damage to humans (ibid: 36).

The objectifying narrative no longer 'securely' subordinates the exoticised other since Qiongbu essentially displays the same rhetorical abilities as the subordinator. Whether he is represented as savage or rational, the whole representational system employed by the narrative is already invalidated by the continuous 'slippage' of codes. The first two sentences in the above quotation might represent the subjective psychology of Qiongbu: it is a voice that rationalises the bear-like creature within the supposedly epistemic territory of a Tibetan hunter and concludes, 'It has no ability to comprehend the necessity of livestock for humans.' Directly after this the narrator is decisively outside the psychology of the 'son of the mountain,' and objectifies the hunter with a scientific vision that concludes that 'you do not understand the principles of the food chain'—a knowledge that the narrator certainly is in possession of, and one that is able to rationalise Qiongbu as an object of observation parallel to Qiongbu's own rationalisation of the bear-creature.

While the old writer's narrative initially appeared as an at least plausible representation of the experience of a Chinese subject in an entirely alien cultural setting, the narrative of Qiongbu displaces the security of narrative integrity; one is no longer 'convinced' by the neat circumscription of cultural identities drawn up in the previous section. Through this de-familiarisation of subjectivities the narrative not only exposes the fictionality of the text but also the fictionality of discrete 'cultural identities:' 'This time it is you who are right; you are a son of a proud hunter, you are a bear hunter, but most importantly you are human; once again your intellect has made you the stronger' (ibid). Qiongbu eventually faces the creature, and indeed it resembles the herdsmen's description. It is definitely not a bear, and in its eyes Qiongbu sees the gaze of a human being. He lets it slip away and informs the old writer. Rather than subduing the creature with the physical endowments inscribed in his character, he defeats the Wild Man with his rational abilities.

The double frame (and 'double framing')

The final coherent prose section of the work (before the two poems) is supposedly, although not necessarily, Lu Gao's 'authentic story about a lyrical performer,' alluded to on two previous occasions in the text. It takes place in the area around the Gangdisi Mountains where the 'exploration party' set up base camp in their search for the Himalayan Snowman and the home of Qiongbu. The presumed narrator of the piece initiates by alluding to a work of Tibetan drama based on an old legend involving the brothers Dunzhu and Dunyue—the historical Tibetan play, *Chungpo*

Dhonyoe Dhondup (頓珠頓月兄弟). In Lu Gao's story the two main characters bear the same names: 'I do not know whether ordinary people can also be reincarnated, but this pair of twins is in fact also named Dunzhu and Dunyue (Ma Y. 2002: 53).

In the present story Dunyue is the lively one and recites lyrical poetry; he is originally a shepherd like his brother but dreams of abandoning this occupation: '"I want to go out and have a look around, go to the interior [內地] and tour various places; to Chengdu, to Xi'an, to Beijing and Shanghai—I also want to see the ocean"' (ibid: 54). Eventually, after he has fulfilled this thirst for adventure, he would like to come back to the village and marry the local girl Nimu. His twin brother Dunzhu, on the other hand, has no desires outside the daily routines of collecting yak dung and herding sheep. He is clumsy and ignorant and not capable of imagining anything outside the apathetic stasis of tradition and routine around the local community.

Dunyue pursues his dream and leaves to join the army—where he soon dies in the line of duty (although this remains unknown to the rest of the characters and initially also to the reader). Nine months later Nimu gives birth to their child, the outcome of a single night's fleeting embrace. Dunzhu and Dunyue's father was allegedly a vagrant blacksmith who had also only dwelt in their mother's tent for one night. The fact that both these generations of women can be considered 'loose' (or paying less heed to the normative conduct of family organization in the invented traditions of 'central' China), while essentially managing households by themselves without the interference of males, situates them in opposition to the majority 'Chinese' not only in terms of morality but also in terms of *temporality*. Their representation as 'promiscuous' minority women acting as heads of families ideally evokes a century-old disciplinary narrative of 'primitive promiscuity' and 'matrilineal society'—concepts denoting early stages of social evolution (predating a 'patrilineal' and eventually a 'class' society) in the theoretical framework developed by Lewis H. Morgan (1818-1895) a hundred years earlier. Morgan's theoretical framework, however, was still prevalent in China in the 1980s primarily due to its general misconception as Marxist. Tong Enzheng (1989) has shown that the evolutionary approach to the study of primitive societies that Morgan developed in his 1877 book *Ancient Society: or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*—which to some extent informed Friedrich Engels' (1820-1895) classic *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* from 1884—had been a cornerstone in ethnological research in China since long before Liberation. Morgan's evolutionary approach allowed for a 'historical comparison' between contemporary primitive tribal systems and ancient forms of social organisation; thus facilitating an analysis of the

ethnic minorities in the PRC (the Tibetans) as 'representations of earlier forms of society' (Gladney 1994: 100) or, indeed, 'living fossils' (Tong 1989: 185). Throughout the work the mystic appeal of Tibet is constantly linked to this idea of temporal displacement—a distant 'mythological world,' far from modern socialist civilization; and even though 'civilising' values from the political centre relentlessly penetrate this world, it follows its ancient ways unobstructed.

This 'mythological world' is further underscored in Lu Gao's story by an emphasis on the claim made earlier by the old writer, that 'myth is a part of their existence.' In the story Dunzhu experiences a series of strange events: 'It is said that Dunzhu and his sheep herd once disappeared for a month; it is said that it was after this that Dunzhu became a lyrical performer [說唱藝人] and started reciting the *Epic of King Gesar* [格薩爾王傳] to the locals' (Ma Y. 2002: 58-59).[11] The narrator, clearly appropriating a voice of the traditional storyteller, offers two possibilities to the mysterious and sudden acquisition of superior literary skills by the illiterate Dunzhu: one is that he accidentally had ventured into a 'divine territory' (神地) after which he 'fell asleep on a large flat rock (this detail is important, please take note)' (ibid: 59); after he awoke he went to have a drink of water and suddenly felt an irresistible urge to sing *The Epic*. He considered the reciting of this the most natural thing in the world—as natural as breathing. This, the narrator insists, is the most popular version of the events, and it corresponds to a local myth on the plateau to the effect that the singers of *The Epic* do not acquire their skill through lengthy study and memorisation, but rather through a case of 'divine intervention.' The other version proposes that his talents were inherited from his father, who was allegedly also a 'lyrical performer' (in addition to a blacksmith); however, this interpretation 'smacks a bit of modern science' and 'genetic engineering,' and is dismissed by the narrator as 'transcendental philosophy' (ibid: 60). The narrator concludes: 'It can thus be seen that the majority of people prefer to believe in myth. Although there might be more idealistic [唯心] and spiritualistic [唯靈] elements in the myth, it is beautiful; obviously legends of this kind are not suited for interference from too many rational elements [唯理成分]' (ibid: 60-61). If the exoticised

[11] The *Epic of King Gesar* is an ancient lyrical epic with origins in and around present-day Tibet (although these cannot be firmly established) and is supposed to have taken shape through oral traditions around the 7th to 9th century and to have spread throughout central Asia after the 10th century. There are no definitive versions of the legend, and it has presumably never been recorded in its entirety due to the fact that it is continuously and cumulatively expanding as well as varying considerably across different narrative traditions. However it is supposedly the longest single literary narrative in the world and could be made to resemble a sort of Tibetan creation myth. The epic is continuously added to by minor narratives from different perspectives, but this essentially does not make it complete; it remains open-ended, and in this sense parallels the narrative structure in 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' itself. On the nature and significance of this epic, see for instance Samuel 2002.

Tibetan other is too infused with these 'rational elements' he or she would, like Qiongbu, no longer be properly 'other' to either the stand-in narrator Lu Gao nor the implied receiver of both Lu Gao's and Ma Yuan's stories.

It was Dunyue who originally loved song and poetry; Dunzhu was illiterate, but now, it seemed, he had somehow been blessed with the natural endowment of his brother (who in the meantime had lost his life in the army). Nimu discovers that her child resembles Dunzhu rather than its father: 'Clumsy, somewhat slow reactions, and with a distinctive facial outline; Dunyue was certainly not like this' (ibid: 64).[12] The locals love listening to Dunzhu reciting those 'ancient, intimate, and stirring stories' (65); and the story about how Dunzhu came to sing *The Epic of King Gesar* 'naturally became an organic part of the life that these Tibetan herdsmen had lived since ancient times' (ibid).

Eventually, however, the attempt by the stand-in narrator to represent the minority other perishes, and he pleads inability to fully structure the events he is relating, '[…] because the outcome greatly surpasses my anticipations; I especially do not know what ethical or moral criteria to use to evaluate this outcome' (ibid: 66). He finally has to step all the way out of the narrative's initial claim to verisimilitude and present a sort of pseudoscientific metanarrative explanation to the incoherencies within the story: 'The story has now more or less been told, but evidently some readers will point out a series of technical [技術以及技巧] problems; let us consider these for a moment' (ibid: 67). He then proceeds to list certain issues he perceives of as relating to the structure and continuity of the story. Eventually the story of Dunyue and Dunzhu reaches a similar ambiguous conclusion as the preceding storylines and is ultimately left hanging unresolved despite the narrator's 'effort' to make it otherwise.

The move to make a character in a work function as a stand-in narrator establishes a link between the limits of representing the other and the act of representation itself. The sudden display of self-consciousness—stepping out of the narrative and formulating comments on it—is structurally

[12] In the historical Tibetan play *Chungpo Dhonyoe Dhondup* that, as mentioned earlier, is initially used as a pretext to Lu Gao's story, a strong emotional bond also exists between the two brothers (sons of King Topkyvilha and different mothers). Dhondup (Dunzhu) is banished into the wilderness after his stepmother convinces the king that he is possessed by a demon; Dhonyo (Dunyue), however, follows his half-brother into banishment (Ross 1995: 50-58). Dunyue also dies in this story, but is brought back to life by a lama; in Lu Gao's story he lives on through letters that his commander in the regiment, out of pity for the young man, has kept on sending to his mother signed in Dunyue's name. Here Dunyue ventures into self-imposed exile in the 'wilderness' of modern society; he performs the opposite journey of Lu Gao, but is no less attracted by the 'mythologies' of the great cities and the ocean.

similar to the main narrative, as mentioned above. The difference in the present case, however, is that this exposure occurs in the 'minor' narrative by a character that has already been narrated and furthermore a character whose exoticising vision has already been laid bare in the preceding narrative in relation to the Disneylandisation of the Tibetan sky burial. Yang Xiaobin has applied the term '*mise-an-abyme*'—a term originally coined by André Gide (1869-1951) in 1893—to aspects in other works by Ma Yuan (Yang X. 2002), but it seems even more relevant in the present case.

Following Gide, the original idea of *mise-en-abyme* is an 'aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it' (Dällenbach 1989: 8). Lucien Dällenbach points out that Gide intended with the term to indicate 'the influence the book has on the author while he is writing it.' In Gide's words: 'A subject cannot act on an object without retroaction by the object on the subject that is acting. It is this reciprocity that *I wanted to indicate*—not one's relationship with other people, but with oneself' (quoted in ibid: 14). In the present case this 'retroaction' might consequently be formulated as the influence the representation of the objectified other has upon the construction of the narrative subject. In other words, the narrative self is constructed actively through its construction and narration of its other. In the words of Dällenbach: 'the secondary narrative […] reflects the primary one in so far as the process of retroaction requires an analogy between the situation of the character and that of the narrator,' which then amounts to 'a coupling or a twinning of activities related to a similar object' (ibid: 18). Lu Gao's 'work within the work' clearly 'mirrors' the work that surrounds it. Central to 'Gangdisi de Youhuo' is the disclosure of the representational structures in the Communist literary system: the cosmopolitan 'outsider' narrative by the old writer, unable to penetrate 'that world of theirs;' the 'othering' modalities exposed in the representation and silencing of Qiongbu by a colonial vision; the cultural voyeurism and ethno-tourism of Lu Gao and Yao Liang at the sky burial. The confined vision of 'secure' cultural identities is confronted throughout the work by this continuous attention to the registers of representation. The character as narrator reflects the narrative perspective of the posited author, the 'narrator in transit:' one that is ambivalent with regard to the categories of self and other and constantly must question the legitimacy of representation itself.

The 'double frame' can thus be said to point to a 'double framing:' The narrative in 'Gangdisi' is structured around the 'internal orientalism' that renders the minority object exotic and other in order to construct the majority subject as homogeneous and normative. However it is clear from the reading of the work that what exactly this majority subject is, or was, or might be turned

into is highly volatile. It amounts instead to a negotiation between 'standpoint' and 'discursive' understandings of subjectivity: a subject-in-transit that refuses to succumb to the discursive pigeonholing in popular and state-sponsored media. In representing 'others' Ma Yuan is able to negotiate the contingencies of his own subject position, a position that shows itself to be under continuous renegotiation. By highlighting the privileged subjective position through various displays of objectifying 'visions' he is able to confront and contest the 'secure' subjectivity that allows for the hegemonic exercise of power in the 'translation' of others.

In the chapter on roots literature in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, Mark Leenhouts writes that although Ma Yuan 'has often written about Tibetan culture […] his treatment of it is too casual to allow him to be included in the roots-seeking current' (2003: 537). However, what in fact distinguished Ma Yuan from the 'roots-searchers' was not that his treatment of Tibetan culture was 'too casual,' but rather that, instead of looking 'inside' in the search for cultural roots and identity, he was looking 'outside:' to the margins of Chinese cultural space and beyond. Although subject matter obviously overlapped with certain *xungen*-writers, and despite the fact that both Ma Yuan and Han Shaogong placed significant emphasis on the connection between space and place in the narrative constituencies of Chinese literature, Ma was investigating the *peripheries*—not the roots—of national, cultural, and literary identities in the mid-1980s. Even to call these 'branches' would be the wrong metaphor: the evolutionary or 'biological' aspect seems absent in Ma Yuan's writing; instead, historical continuity—and even the narrative of cultural identity—is collapsed and reassembled at random. Also unlike the *xungen* 'movement' (or at least the aspects of Han Shaogong's thesis related in Chapter Four), it is linked to World Literary Time rather than discrete cultural or hemispheric temporalities.

In 1989, when the June Fourth Incident made Gao Xingjian, Ma Jian, Yang Lian and others decide not to return to China and the communist literary system in any immediate future, and instead continue their travels or let themselves be exiled abroad, Ma Yuan returned to eastern China to devote himself to teaching and scholarship. Like the 'third category' before him—writers like Shi Zhecun, Qian Zhongshu, or Shen Congwen—he abandoned creative writing at a time of destabilisation in the literary field and opted for recluse in academia. He has subsequently written a significant amount of textbooks on world literature, with a particular fondness for Hemingway, Gide, Borges, and the like; significantly, however, these publications display an increasingly static conception of World Literary Time—which to some extent is evident in his expressed 'loss of faith'

in the sanctioning value of the Nobel Prize. In the essay-cum-lecture 'Zhongguo Xiaoshuo yu Nuobeier' 中國小說與諾貝爾 [Chinese literature and the Nobel], he maintains that when he was young, and read all the translated masterpieces of world literature that were appearing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he saw the Nobel Prize as a marker of 'excellence'—as representing the very centre of world literary space. Later, however, his enthusiasm dwindled somewhat when he realised that there were quite a few 'mediocre' writers among the laureates, and in fact since the 1950s, the Swedish Academy has not managed to come up with 'any real good writer' (Ma Y. 2009: 374). He reasonably questions the reading abilities of the 'old men' on the committee in light of the shear magnitude of novels published every year: 'perhaps the Nobel Committee simply cannot read that many books and has lost their rudimentary power of judgement,' he speculates. 'Strange occurrences—such as when the overseas Chinese [華僑] French writer Gao Xingjian, who writes in Chinese in France, suddenly also receives the prize—can only happen because it already lost its meaning a long time ago' (ibid). The categorical rejection of Gao Xingjian is not founded directly in a critique of his literary abilities, but in his inability to represent a national literary space. Of course, this might simply be Ma Yuan's attempt to toe official narrative; in both cases, however, it represents a repositioning in accordance with Beijing Time, and a departure from the 'transnational imagination' expressed in his fictional works from the 1980s.

Ma Yuan can in this sense be seen as returning to the 'centre' of the Communist literary system in both person and writing after 1989. At the same time as he abandoned his inroads into the counter-system, other writers were already defining it abroad, and effectively challenging the narrative of Chinese literature in international literary space. June Fourth marked the symbolic turning point for this generation of writers, where they either abandoned their creative exploration of the 'exilic vision' in favour of adherence to Beijing Time and the dictates of the communist literary system, like Ma Yuan etc., or continued these explorations in political exile abroad, such as Ma Jian, Gao Xingjian, Yang Lian, and others; or perhaps, like Ha Jin, only realised themselves as writers abroad and by the very consequence of exile.

Part Three

Writing in the Counter-System

Chapter Seven

Unity in Opposition: Configuring Boundaries in the Counter-System

The distancing from Beijing Literary Time and the testing of boundaries to national identity that took place within the bounds of the Communist literary system in the 1980s, and apparently was abandoned by Ma Yuan in 1989, was taken abroad and outside the immediate reach of government control by a number of other writers. Like Yang Lian described above, exile might for some of these writers function as a 'continuation' of the 'inner journey' begun in China a decade or so earlier: a further distancing from the system in both body and writing, and the continuous inscription of a 'necessary elsewhere' in the literary narrative. In exile abroad, however, the distancing functions in a double sense: it both affords the creative sustenance of the 'vision in exile'—the 'distancing' that enables a writer 'to see clearly and make accurate judgements about people and events,' as Gao Xingjian argued—while at the same time providing the freedom to construct a new theoretical position vis-à-vis national and international literary space. Writing outside the Communist literary system allows for an explicit questioning of the 'national forms' as well as questioning or relative abandonment of national identity; however, by operating in the transnational counter-system, these writers also subjects themselves to an international set of regulations that, as delineated in Chapter One, tends to emphasises and essentialise literary identities from the periphery of world literary space as national, cultural, exotic, and in various ways 'other' to the central currents of World Literary Time. Viewed in the context of Casanova's paradigm, Chinese literary space does not stop at the borders of the People's Republic but extends beyond, even to hyphenated writers like Ha Jin, who were never active in the literary field in China

but implicated in the definition of the boundaries of the counter-system, as will be shown below, by his very activity as a writer. At this point it might be argued, then, that although significant counter-narratives to the hegemony of the Communist *national forms* are still voiced from within the PRC, sometimes without incurring the violent silencing of Liu Xiaobo—such as Murong Xuecun 慕容雪村 (b. 1974), Han Han 韓寒 (b. 1982), and others—it seems that the more 'internationally inclined' writers (Casanova's conception) in Chinese literary space are physically and symbolically positioned outside the Communist literary system. This does not rule out, however, significant leeway in the interstices between these systems, and a continuous questioning and negotiation of national identity in international literary space.

After June Fourth

In 1990, ten years after it was shut down by the authorities in Beijing, *Jintian* was re-established as an 'overseas publication' with an office in Oslo. As before, it had Bei Dao as editor-in-chief and several of the original writers, such as Yang Lian, Wan Zhi 萬之 (Chen Maiping 陳邁平, b. 1952), and Duo Duo 多多 (Li Shizheng 栗世征, b. 1951), were also involved, and thus despite its relocation to Norway, the journal promised a certain amount of continuity with the past. From the outset, then, *Jintian* positioned itself as a leading organ of the exiled mainland avant-garde, and came to function as an important locus for the transnational counter-system of Chinese literary space. In the editorial to the inaugural issue of the second running, the purpose was made clear:

> 一九八九年在中國發生的事變，把中國作家推入複雜而特殊的境地，於是促成了《今天》在海外復刊。
>
> 從停刊到復刊，十年過去了。
>
> 過去的一切都是有意義的。
>
> 因此，作為過去的一切的必要的延續，復刊的《今天》將不改初衷：反對文化專制，提倡文藝創作自由，主張中國文學的多元發展。我們不可能迴避社會和政治現實的河流，但我們确認文學是另一條河流，以至個人可以因此被流放到現實以外。
>
> The incident that occurred in China in 1989 has forced Chinese writers into a complicated and unique predicament, and thus prompted the continuation of *Jintian* abroad.
>
> Ten years have passed between the termination and continuation of publication.
>
> All that has passed is significant.
>
> Thus, since the continued publication of *Jintian* is a necessary continuation of things past, it will not alter its original intention: oppose cultural autocracy, promote freedom of production in literature and art, and stand firm on a pluralistic development of Chinese literature. We cannot evade the waterways of socio-political realities; but we are confident that literature is a different waterway; one

> that might let the individual float [or: 'be exiled' (*liufang*)] outside reality. (*Jintian* bianjibu 1990: second page, n.p.)

The editors were obviously not afraid of taking the lead in the struggle for an autonomous Chinese literature, even if this had to take place outside the mainland literary field in a somewhat antithetical position to the system in which they had been central figures a decade earlier. They did not try to hide the fact that the immediate motivation for this stance was to 'oppose cultural autocracy'—but although this had also been a central point twelve years earlier (see Chapter Four), the editors did not bother to name the Gang of Four this time around, but pointed instead to the fundamental defects of the Communist literary system. The reference to the Tiananmen Incident the year before was unmistakable, and the inaugural issue furthermore carried strong pieces by standout writers such as Yang Lian, Gao Xingjian, as well as Bei Dao himself. Several of these pieces were inspired by, or directly related to, June Fourth.

Gao Xingjian's 'Taowang'—a play in two acts set in an abandoned warehouse, where three characters hide from army bullets and advancing tanks at a nearby 'square'—took up one quarter of the pages in the issue. Although Tiananmen is never mentioned by name in the play, and despite the fact Gao points out in the accompanying notes that 'Taowang' 'should not be made into a play of socialist realism, which seeks only to mirror contemporary political incidents' (Gao 1990: 64; tr. Gilbert Fong, Gao 2007a: 66), there is no mistaking either the setting or the dramatic implications of being anything but specifically framed by June Fourth. The debate that ensued, as to whether it was a political or an existential play (see Kong, B. 2012: 64-74) itself goes some of the distance in testifying to the close intermingling of the two issues: more than physical bloodshed, the Tiananmen Incident came to represent the final symbolic departure from the reach of totalitarian politics.[1] Gao has later explained that the composition of the play came about due to advances by an American theatre company to write a play about 'real life' in China, and that he had 'publically announced [his] resignation from the Chinese Communist Party […], when the first shots of the massacre were fired' (Gao 1996: 183; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2007b: 123). The highly oppressive atmosphere in the play seems to suggest only one opportunity for the individual (and by implication

[1] Belinda Kong writes that although 'Taowang' might be read as an existentialist play, since 'the warehouse is symbolically situated at the threshold of state violence and the characters are uniformly threatened with imminent death, they can be read as united in a basic human condition of confronting mortality, which presses upon them with ever-greater urgency the task of affirming their individual existence' (Kong, B. 2012: 65). However, according to Kong, 'the play is political through and through;' the characters 'act and speak mostly as tokens rather than truly individualised personalities. In this sense, the play is more political than an existentialist allegory, with each character representing a type—student, woman, writer—and its corresponding outlook on politics rather than the species category of human' (ibid: 66).

literature) when faced by massive dehumanising structures, such as 'the nation' and 'the people'—voiced, for instance, by the character most closely resembling the viewpoints of the writer himself: 'They can easily crush your so-called "people" into minced meat, also in the name of "the people" […]. Escape is what we have to face now! […] To live is to escape' (Gao 1990: 45; 2007a: 14); or as Gao Xingjian remarked at the first staging of the play in Stockholm the following year: 'life is a state of perpetual fleeing, from political oppression or from others. One must also flee from one's self, because once the self has been awakened it is this that one cannot flee; this is the tragedy of modern man' (Gao 1996: 184; 2007b: 124). In a broader perspective, however, escape could also signal a new beginning; a necessary prerequisite for the forward evolution of Chinese literary space, as the editors of *Jintian* appeared to suggest. In this regard, escape can also be read as a perpetual homecoming—not to the nation, but to literature.

Jintian was in this sense not merely an 'overseas publication,' but had an expressed exilic identity that positioned itself in opposition to 'socio-political realities'—whether Chinese or otherwise—and answered to rules 'outside' these realities, in the transnational counter-system of Chinese literary space and the World Republic of Letters. This exilic claim to literary autonomy also involves the organisation of writers, not only outside the nation, but also as a 'counter-system.' A notice inside the issue announces a 'symposium on Chinese writers overseas' (海外中國作家討論會) co-organised by Oslo University, Stockholm University, and the editorial department of *Jintian*. Alliances with these institutions signalled a departure from the journal's early years of 'independence' and 'underground' status in favour of establishing bonds with key transnational players: scholars, publishers, and translators abroad. The symposium was to address the course and development of Chinese literature over the past ten years, as well as to

> 討論了八九年後中國文學的處境和前景，討論了海外中國作家面臨的問題，如和民主運動的關係問題、在新的社會和文化環境中如何生存和寫作的問題、自身組織和出版刊物的問題、作品翻譯和版權問題。
> discuss the predicament and prospects for Chinese literature after 1989, and address the problems faced by overseas Chinese writers—such as the relationship to the democracy movement, how to live and write in a new social and cultural environment, how to organise ourselves and publish our works, as well as questions of translation and copyright. (25)

Clearly the writers were searching out the possibilities for forming transnational ties outside the national context, while seeking at the same time to form a sort of continuity as a counter-system—which was still specifically *national* in nature. This involved practical issues, such as questions of translation and copyright, but also the delicate task of defining the exact relationship to the

Democracy Movement—which was obviously deeply intertwined with the transnationalisation of *Jintian*, but a movement that also had to be kept at a certain distance, so as to not too overtly intermingle political concerns with literary ones. Unifying 'overseas Chinese writers' was not only a desire to escape 'cultural autocracy' in favour literary autonomy alone, but also a shared experience of daily problems involved in writing outside the nation; but significantly, the writers involved in *Jintian* did not aspire to write outside Chinese literary space, but actively participated in and addressed the problems faced by this space, in the context of world literature, after the events of 1989—which had prompted a both material and symbolic division between the system and the counter-system but essentially kept the imagination of Chinese literary space intact. Thus despite the specific exilic identity of the journal, and the concrete addressing of the problems faced by 'overseas Chinese literature,' *Jintian* was not exclusively for *exile writers*. A 'notice to contributors' (稿約), for instance, clarifies that the editorial department of *Jintian* welcomed contributions from 'Chinese writers at home or abroad' in addition to scholarship and criticism by Sinologists (40). While being in this sense a very transnational endeavour, answering only to the laws of the World Republic of Letters, there was no question of where 'home' still was. In an 'editorial afterword' (編後語), it is emphasised that, despite the difficulties surrounding the publication of *Jintian* abroad, the editors are confident that 'after the events of 1989, people need a literary publication such as *Jintian* to serve as a *connecting point in the development of Chinese literature*—[one that] connects home [海內] and abroad [海外] and the past with the present' (100, my italics). The idea of being a 'connecting point' is as essential as the positioning outside 'socio-political realities:' Chinese literature was still Chinese literature, but politics had forced writers to forge a new home outside, and even antithetical, to political China.

While temporary exile abroad in the early years of the Republic was often both a political necessity and a significant step in the process of gaining access to world literary time (as discussed in Chapter Two), these journeys were rarely intended as—or at least rarely achieved the effect of—defiant acts of indefinite expatriation: writings, journals, and movements promoting the 'literary revolution,' initiated particularly in Japan and USA, were to varying extents directed back at China and intended for consumption by Chinese readers involved in the nationalist movement. In 'Zhongguo Liuwangwenxue de Kunjing' 中國流亡文學的困境 [The predicament of Chinese exile literature], originally presented as a talk at the University of London in June 1992, Gao Xingjian declared:

> 一九八九年天安門事件之後，許多中國作家紛紛流亡海外，加上原已應邀在海外訪問的，講學的，也不得不在西方定居下來，為數可觀，而且大都還繼續寫作，既出書，又辦刊物，名符其實，形成了一股潮流，應該說，這還是中國文學史上沒有過的事情。這之前，辛亥革命以來，隨然[*sic*.]也有一些作家，或留學講學，旅居海外，也有的還從事創作，但都只客居他鄉，憂憂遊子心態，故國時時在夢中，並不認可流亡。
>
> After the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, quite a few Chinese writers went into exile abroad; and when you add those who had already been invited abroad for visits [*fangwen*] or lectures, and had no alternative but to settle down permanently in the west, it amounts to a significant number. Furthermore, the majority [of these writers] continues to write, as well as to publish books and journals, and in fact has come to form a current. It should be pointed out that this has never previously occurred in Chinese literary history. Before this, even though there were a few writers who stayed abroad to study or teach after the Xinhai Revolution, and even some who continued to write, they were never more than sojourners in an alien land [*keju taxiang*]: they had the mindset of the worried wanderer [*youzi*] and the homeland was always in their dreams; it certainly cannot be recognised as exile. (Gao 1996: 108)

In Gao's words, then, the Tiananmen Incident came to be pivotal in the expansion of the counter-system of Chinese literary space, and gathered narratives by exiled Chinese writers into an actual 'current' that was able to challenge the majoritising narrative directed by the CCP and sustained by the Communist literary system. Although Chinese writers have been writing outside the nation ever since the conception of this nation, as Gao reiterated in an interview from 2001, 'in a real sense Chinese exiled writers and Chinese exile literature have never existed' (Lee and Dutrait 2001: 741); June Fourth, however, brought this into existence. The incident itself embodies a conflict between a majoritising state vision and a variety of minoritising voices in opposition to this vision. June Fourth, and particularly the subsequent crackdowns on dissidents and activists, thus provided a political incitement to go into exile abroad; at the same time, the Tiananmen Incident is so extreme in its symbolic language, that it marks the final break away from the Communist literary system.

Writing about avant-garde (or 'misty') poetry, Maghiel van Crevel points out, that June Fourth effected 'a breakdown of communications between domestic and exile poetry scenes' that did not let off until the late 1990s; and that to some extent, these scenes have 'been competing for the stamp of authenticity and Bourdieuian legitimacy in present-day Chinese poetry' (van Crevel 2008: 144). But as he also observes, although June Fourth can be seen as 'an exceptionally powerful catalyst of the emergence of PRC exile literature itself,' it should be considered merely 'one of several concurrent trajectories of cultural change—rather than its root cause' (ibid: 162). This 'breakdown' or struggle for 'the stamp of authenticity' between national and exilic 'scenes' can be seen to characterise the conflict between the Communist literary system and the 'current' described by Gao Xingjian as well.

The horror of immobility

Whereas 'Taowang' employed a highly oppressive atmosphere to accompany the central theme of entrapment—in temporary safety from the physical violence in the abandoned warehouse but perpetually 'trapped' by the psychological violence perpetrated by the state at large—to stage the symbolic implications of the Tiananmen Incident on issues of artistic and intellectual freedom, other writers have chosen a similar representational frame while seeming to point towards different solutions. The theme of escape combined with the inability to move might be seen as a crucial metaphor in the narrative employment of June Fourth and its representational echo in the exilic narrative condition. Belinda Kong suggests that the 'recourse in flight and exile as the inevitable finale of June 4 […] constitutes a dominant paradigm for diasporic fictions on Tiananmen' (ibid: 104). This clearly recall the issues raised in Chapters Four and Five of the rhetorical function of 'mobility' in the Communist literary system, particularly around the middle of the 1980s, and how this broad dialectic was challenged by the combined processes of narrative and bodily *movement* to the boundaries of the system. The trope of 'movement' is also evident on a similarly abstract level in the *Jintian* editors' emphasis on the 'pluralistic *development* of Chinese literature:' a desire for progression seen in obvious contrast to the implied stagnation or 'forced immobility' exercised by totalitarian politics in general, and visualised most vividly in the forceful suppression of activists and demonstrators on June Fourth 1989. The crackdown symbolised a forceful and final discontinuity of 'movement' in a spiritual sense; most obviously in regard to the broad signifier of the 'Democracy Movement,' but also in the broader sense of progression towards some idealised state of public 'enlightenment.' From this perspective it might seem paradoxical that in terms of economic and political principles, the crackdown represented quite the opposite: a solution to a state of immobility and the continuation of the course towards national prosperity. From both perspectives, however, the Incident stands as a symbol of intellectual death; whether or not this is considered a good thing depends on the eyes that see.

Ma Jian's *Rou zhi Tu* 肉之土 [Soil of flesh] (aka *Beijing Zhiwuren* 北京植物人; tr. *Beijing Coma*) from 2008 and Ha Jin's *The Crazed* from 2002 in different ways address issues of the immobilised body and imaginary space in relation to the Tiananmen Incident and in turn links this to the symbolic division of Chinese literary space. In both works a central character is confined to a sickbed: in the former as a result of having been shot in the head during the clearing of the square (leaving the narrator-protagonist in a state of coma) and in the latter due to a stroke suffered several

months before the Incident (employing the first-person narrator as a sort of caretaker for the immobilised body). Although *Rou zhi Tu* uses multiple timeframes, both works build up to the apex of the June Fourth demonstrations, and thus draw a vivid parallel between the immobilised body and what initially appears as infinite social and cultural mobility. While Ma Jian's narrator is the one confined in the immobilised body, Ha Jin's narrator is observing the Lu Xunesque madness of the eponymous 'crazed' from the outside.

Ha Jin's madman, like Lu Xun's, is of course not simply a raving lunatic, but speaks also 'truths' that seem to have been forgotten in the midst of prevailing social madness. Having suffered a stroke and become partly paralysed, Professor Yang despairs over the plight of the intellectual in communist China in a series of semi-conscious deliriums, or perhaps 'visions of clarity,' conducted from his hospital bed. No-longer content to be a 'clerk' in the bureaucratic machinery, Shenmin Yang abandons all academic ambitions. As in this situation, faced by an industrious younger colleague:

> 'I don't want to be a clerk anymore. I have quit.'
>
> 'What are you talking about? Are you not our best scholar?'
>
> 'No, I've been a clerk all my life, so have you. We're all chattels of the state.'
>
> Professor Song looked at him in alarm. He said, 'I don't understand this, Shenmin. Why should we look down on ourselves so? We're both intellectuals, aren't we?'
>
> 'No, we're not. Who is an intellectual in China? Ridiculous, anyone with a college education is called an intellectual. The truth is that all people in the humanities are clerks and all people in the sciences are technicians. Tell me, who is a really independent intellectual, has original ideas and speaks the truth? None that I know of. We're all dumb labourers kept by the state—a retrograde species.
>
> 'So you're not a scholar?'
>
> 'I told you, I'm just a clerk, a screw in the machine of the revolution. You're the same, neither worse nor better. We are of the same ilk and have the same fate, all having relapsed into savagery and cowardice. Now this screw is worn out and has to be replaced, so write me off as a loss.' (Jin 2003: 153)

Obviously the metaphor of the 'screw in the machine' points to the collectivised subject in Maoist revolutionary discourse, particularly socialist icons like Lei Feng 雷鋒 (1940-1962), who allegedly contended that 'a person's usefulness to the revolutionary cause is like a screw in a machine. It is only by the many interconnecting and fixed screws that the machine is able to become a solid whole, to move freely, and increase its enormous work power. Even though a screw is small, its use is beyond estimation' (Lei F. 1977: 74-75). In fact the immobilised body in Ha Jin's story, Professor Yang, agrees completely with Lei Feng on this assertion; it is just that he does not agree with the 'revolutionary cause' or communist project in any greater sense—and furthermore insists that it is the intellectual's responsibility to always criticise and expose the exploitative dimensions

of the machine. Rather than, like Lei Feng, to assume the perspective of the machine and assert 'a man's usefulness' to the greater cause, he assumes the opposite perspective, and points to the screw's systematic exploitation by the machine. This reversal, again, recalls Lu Xun's metaphor of cannibalism in 'Kuangren Riji'—'wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all eye each other with the deepest suspicion' (Lu X. 2006: 16; tr. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Lu X. 1981: 8); only now the individual is not devoured by society but put to use in the social machinery, which in Professor Yang's assertion amounts to intellectual death and the definitive immobilisation of individual intention. Professor Song, in the discussion quoted above, implores Yang that there is still hope for the 'new generation of scholars' (the 'children,' to sustain the reference to Lu Xun[2]), such as the narrator, Jian Wan, who observes the conversation from the side. This too, is dismissed by Yang: '"He'd better leave this iron house soon so that he won't end up a mere scribe here. In our country no scholars can live a life different from a clerk's. We're all automatons without a soul. You too should go before it's too late. Don't get trapped here"' (Jin 2002: 154).

Lu Xun's famous anecdote from the introduction to *Nahan* 吶喊 [Outcry] (1923), which has repeatedly been invoked by the CCP in its denunciation of 'feudal society,' is turned against the contemporary period of Reforms and Opening as well:

> 假如一間鐵屋子，是絕無窗戶而萬難破毀的，裡面有許多熟睡的人們，不久都要悶死了，然而是從昏睡入死滅，並不感到就死的悲哀。現在你大嚷起來，驚起了較為清醒的幾個人，使這不幸的少數者來受無可挽救的臨終的苦楚，你倒以為對得起他們麼？
> Imagine an iron house having not a single window and virtually indestructible, with all its inmates sound asleep and about to die of suffocation. Dying in their sleep, they won't feel the pain of death. Now if you raise a shout to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making these unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you really think you are doing them a good turn? (Lu X. 2006: 5; tr. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, Lu X. 1981: v).

The evocation of Lu Xun's 'iron house' metaphor suggests that no progression has taken place in China since the late Qing—a period in Chinese history widely regarded as one of socio-political regression, international humiliation, and military defeat. Obviously everyone is horrified by Professor Yang's historical parallel, the mere mentioning of which could easily land one in prison or a labour camp in Qinghai; however, this is obviously also at the very root of his misfortune, the fact that the machine does not allow its screws to draw attention to the basic workings of the

[2] 'Kuangren Riji' ends with the plea: 'perhaps there are still children who haven't eaten men? Save the children…' (Lu 2006: 19-20; 1981: 12).

mechanism. The fact of censorship and intellectual repression in the light of uninhibited economic mobility in China in the 1980s is in this sense the cause of Yang's stroke; clearly he is one of 'the lighter sleepers,' and his damnation to physical immobility becomes an awakening to 'irrevocable death.' Yang's misfortune, of course, is that when he finally reaches the point where he is able to speak out his vision of the 'iron house,' which seems to have disturbed him with increasing intensity throughout most of his academic career, he is immobilised by a stroke and finally dies as tanks move into Beijing in the days leading up to June Fourth. This relieves the first-person narrator Jian Wan from his filial duties (he is initially also engaged to the professor's daughter), and he is driven towards Tiananmen Square with the crowds of protesters:

> Different from them, I had no grand purpose or dream of democracy and freedom; nor did I have the sense of responding to our national exigencies. My motive was mainly personal—I was driven by desperation, anger, madness, and stupidity. First, I meant to show Meimei that I was not a coward and could go to the capital at any time and in any way I chose. Second, I wanted to puncture a hole in this indestructible cocoon that caged me; somehow I felt that the right place to plunge a knife in was Beijing—the sick heart of this country. I was crazed, unable to think logically, and was possessed by an intense desire to prove that I was a man capable of action and choice. So I set out for the capital with a feverish head. (Jin 2003: 295)

Similar to his professor or Lu Xun's madman, Jian Wan has now also become 'crazed,' and wants to destroy the iron house by striking at the deceased centre of the socio-political body—at 'the sick heart of this country:' Beijing. The witnessing of the atrocities on Tiananmen Square consequently serves as Jian's awakening, and the realisation that the machine is indestructible; but rather than being content to die with the others in the iron house, he decides to flee into exile: 'I bought a ticket for Nanjing, where I would switch to an express bound for Guangzhou. I planned to sneak across the border into Hong Kong,' and from there 'to another country—Canada, or the United States, or Australia, or some place in Southeast Asia where Chinese is widely used' (Jin 2003: 322).

Belinda Kong, who has written the only monograph in English on fictional representations of the Tiananmen Incident by Chinese 'diaspora writers,' points out that '[i]n the narrative arc of *The Crazed* […] the Tiananmen incident has value only insofar as it ascertains an insight that should have been obvious to Jian long ago, and insofar as it finally and successfully catapults the hitherto self-absorbed hero into a journey to enlightenment—overseas' (Kong, B. 2012: 103-104). The 'psychic stasis' of the narrator-protagonist, moreover, is emblematic to the novel, says Kong: 'He offers a first-person narrative that bears historical witness to June 3-4, but via a narrator whose imperfect and peripheral vision, at best remote and belated, is repeatedly emphasised' (ibid: 111). Kong relates this to Ha Jin's 'diasporic distance' and 'long-distance perception' in his own

experience of the events by pointing to the 'fact of mediated and partial knowledge,' which he shares with his protagonist: 'The many consequences of government censorship—discrepancy among reports, uncertainty about exact casualty counts, the suspicion of a massive cover-up by the regime—structure Jin's as much as Jian's remote and traumatic reception of the event,' and become 'decisive in inaugurating a diasporic existence' for both (ibid: 114). It is interesting to notice, then, how June Fourth is doubly linked to vision in Ha Jin's novel: while it serves as an axis of inter-generational 'access to vision' and becomes 'decisive in inaugurating a diasporic existence,' it is also conceptually linked to a 'blockage of vision' perpetrated largely by censorship, but also due to the limitations of 'long-distance perception.' *The Crazed* can in this sense be read as highlighting the blind spots in the 'visions in exile.' Although distance might allow one 'to see clearer,' there is also a certain amount of obscuring going on; more than anything, perhaps, it becomes a narrative about the *mediation of vision*: although distance provides blind spots it can never be quite as obstructive as state censorship and the centralised management of truth in the PRC.

In *Rou zhi Tu*, the Tiananmen Incident relates differently to issues of vision and 'diasporic existence.' In Ma Jian's novel the immobilisation of the body is a direct consequence of the crackdown (a bullet to the head), there is no possibility of physical escape to some foreign country: the body is indefinitely immobilised and transfixed as a living corpse in a shallow grave; escape becomes an internal probing of the hidden cavities of the mind, an inward turn to the deepest sensory impulses. Belinda Kong, in the study mentioned above, suggests that 'where Tiananmen prompts flight to freedom and optimistically inaugurates diasporic afterlife for [Ha] Jin's Jian […], Ma's Dai Wei, by epitomising the square, marks the point at which diasporisation fails' (Kong, B. 2012: 199). Kong describes this with Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics,'[3] which she sees as the work's overall concern—namely the display of 'the continuity of the state's cannibalistic biopolitics even in the post-Tiananmen era of prosperity' (ibid). The reference to Lu Xun's famous

[3] In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes the transformation of the mechanisms of power that took precedence in Europe from the 17th century onwards, as a process from the sovereign right to administer death to the administration of life instead. This 'power over life' evolved along two distinct but interrelated poles: 'One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimisation of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterised the *disciplines*: an *anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanisms of life and serving as the basis of the biological process: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*' (Foucault 1980: 139, his italics).

metaphor is made explicitly throughout the novel, on the one hand through accounts of actual acts of cannibalism during the Cultural Revolution and on the other, in the post-Mao period of Reforms and Opening, evidenced in prevailing organ-harvesting by the state—notably from sentenced criminals, who, in the minutes after they are shot in the back of the head, have their organs removed by surgeons present at the execution ground. While having witnessed the latter instance first-hand on several occasions, the first-person narrator is only made aware of the former case of 'cannibalistic biopolitics' by pursuing his father's past as a branded 'counterrevolutionary.' In one revealing passage, a doctor formerly affiliated with a labour camp in Guangxi where his father underwent reform-through-labour during the Cultural Revolution, informs him that certainly class enemies were eaten during the Cultural Revolution—not due to starvation but out of hatred. When he questions the doctor about a specific girl, Liu Ping, which his father used to speak warmly of, he is informed that:

> 劉萍當時才十六歲，是農場一枝花，會拉小提琴還會跳舞。她也在父親死的那個晚上被輪姦了以後用繩子勒死，然後被切了乳房和陰部還有她的肝，給那幾個男人炒熟當下酒的菜了。
> Liu Ping was only sixteen when they killed her. She was the prettiest girl on the farm. She could dance and play the violin. The night the militia killed her father, they raped her, then strangled her with a piece of rope. Once she was dead, they cut off her breasts [and genitals] and gouged out her liver, then fried them in oil and ate them. (Ma J. 2010: 67; tr. Flora Drew, Ma J. 2008: 58).

After having his eyes opened by the doctor's horrifying account, the narrator stumbles out onto the street and displays acute symptoms of the escalating alienation and paranoia known from Lu Xun's madman; in almost identical imagery as one of the opening scenarios in 'Kuangren Riji,' where the madman feels that he is continuously observed by people on the street, contemplating with all possible certainty to attack him at any moment and devour his flesh: 'As I walked from his office to the guest house, the skin on my back went numb. I sensed that everyone around me—the people walking behind me, or milling around on the street, and even the legless beggar sitting propped up against the lamp post—was about to pounce on me and eat me alive' (ibid: 68; 59).

By pointing to a biopolitical continuity of socio-cultural cannibalism that runs through the history of the People's Republic, says Belinda Kong, Ma Jian empties the Tiananmen Incident of its representational potential of escape, as found in *The Crazed* and to some extent 'Taowang:' 'Superimposed onto Dai Wei's iron bed now is the past biopolitics of the village farm, the execution ground, the urban hospital, and Tiananmen Square itself—at the heart of each lies an immobilised body whose threshold of life and death is almost entirely determined by the state' (Kong, B. 2012: 199). However, the immobilised body also becomes a site for 'internal travel:' the

fact of having been physically reduced to a comatose vegetable allows the consciousness to drift through the veins and arteries as a sort of Taoist micro-cosmos, to explore 'alternative worlds,' and draw the conclusion that all those in the so-called 'living world' are in fact the real comatose vegetables. Dai Wei's body becomes a counter-reflection of the national 'soil of flesh'—seemingly in motion but actually stagnant; the seemingly immobile 'flesh of soil' is, according the narrator's reasoning, actually the only one 'in motion:'

> 我真想從這深沉的死睡醒來，再走進外面昏迷的群眾之中嗎？在這個植物化了的社會，肉體活過來也要頭腦麻木了，總要損失一半……先是從社會縮回了家，又從家裡縮回肉體，再從肉內縮進骨灰盒或者泥土裡……那麼，等死就成了出路，機會就在眼前……但內心依然有些慾望，想把那本《圖本山海經》研究透了，再沿著那些山河走一遍，寫出本當代的地理、植物、動物……
>
> Do I really want to wake from this deep sleep and rejoin the comatose crowds outside? I withdrew from society and retreated into my bedroom, then from my bedroom I retreated into my body. Eventually, I will leave my body behind, and retreat into the earth. When seen from this perspective, death looks like an easy escape route. But although I'm tempted to take it, something pulls me back. I still want to read the *Illustrated Edition of the Book of Mountains and Seas* one more time, then travel through the landscapes it describes, and write a scientific treatise elucidating every geographical, botanical, zoological… (Ma J. 2010: 539; 2008: 515)

The comatose body becomes a many-facetted signifier. Whereas, as Kong observes, it might be seen as 'epitomising the square' and pointing to the moment where 'diasporisation' succumbs to the state's biopolics, it works also as a form of double-sided (or self-reflective) metaphor for China in the most abstract and most concrete sense: as an idea and as the land (or 'soil') itself. To the outer world, Dai Wei is as good as dead; he is the bodily manifestation of state suppression and intellectual death. In his catatonic state, he is himself also unable to see the outside world; he has been stripped of his vision, but has consequently attuned his other senses: his sense of smell, his hearing, but particularly his 'inner vision.' His escape becomes inward, as he travels through his body 'like a submarine through the sea of red-brown cells' (ibid: 134; 122); intertextually ingrained in this inward escape is the *Shanhai Jing*. Ever since he was a child, Dai Wei used to love this ancient book of strange lands and weird creatures, and always wanted to travel the routes described: 'As a child, I'd loved this survey of ancient China for its magical descriptions of gods and monsters. But now I began to read it for the interesting scientific data it provided. […] Although modern scholars believe the book to be a work of the imagination, I was convinced that it was based on real experience,' and Dai Wei yearns to 'follow in the footsteps of the unknown author' (ibid: 51; 41). However, after he falls into a coma the landscape described in the book inscribes itself on the internal landscape of the comatose body: 'I'd hoped to explore those lands one day, but instead I've

been forced to wander through the interior landscape of my blood vessels and organs' (ibid: 261; 249). And later:

> 那麼，腦中的《山海經》，大大小小五千三百七十座山，都被我走遍了嗎？那些深埋在地下的金銀銅鐵，長到天上的樹，還有那就個頭的鳥……在我十年的身體旅行之中，我發現那些奇蹟都在肉裡了，那些山峰和沼澤……也就知道了通往心靈的是一條退路，只有昏死的人才會找到，活人只能在陌生的路上奔跑到死……
> Have I now explored all 5,370 mountains of *The Book of Mountains and Seas*? On my travels through my body, I've discovered that all the wonders described in the book exist within me: the peaks and marshes, the buried ores, the trees that grow in the clouds and the birds with nine heads. I know now that to reach the soul, you must travel backwards. But only people who are asleep have time to tread that backward path. Those who are awake must hurtle blindly onwards until the day they die… (ibid: 591; 566)

In a foreword to the Taiwanese edition of *Rou zhi Tu*, David Wang suggests that this world of 'alternate imagination' (異想) might extend to the 'alternate world' (異鄉) of Ma Jian's earlier works, as discussed in Chapter Five: an alternative imaginary space, 'far from the fetters of the Central Plains' politico-philosophical space and time, [where] the universe and the body appear to become open and clear;' but on the other hand, the 'demons and monsters' that abound in the world of *Shanhai Jing* might conversely be seen as an inverted image of the real world (Wang, D. 2010: 8). The supernatural geography of *Shanhai Jing* fuses with the immobilised body to draw a map of contemporary realpolitik, and situates June Fourth at its bleeding centre. Rather than the 'escape into a different landscape and culture' of Ma Jian's earlier travel-inspired writing, it becomes entrapment in one's own landscape of flesh.

Shanhai Jing in fact points to more than that. In a somewhat similar way as the *Chu Ci* was seen by the *xungen* movement in China in the 1980s, as a proto-cultural document of an 'original' aesthetics eventually lost down the ages, so might the *Shanhai Jing* be cast in terms of an 'alternative originality' to the Confucian classics. In Gao Xingjian's dramatic appropriation of the work from 1993, *Shanhai Jing Zhuan* 山海經傳 [Of mountains and seas], he points out in the directions to the play:

> 中國遠古神話豐富多彩不亞於古希臘，可喜被後世居於正統的儒家經學刪改得面目全非，幾乎掩蓋這些神話本來的面目。作者則企圖恢復中國遠古神話的那分率真，以為較之種種常理的解釋內涵更為豐富。
> Ancient Chinese mythology is no less rich and colourful than Greek mythology. Unfortunately, it has been cut and altered by generations of orthodox Confucianists, who have rendered it unrecognisable; they almost managed to bury its true look and characteristics. I have tried to restore the innocence in

> ancient Chinese mythology, which I consider richer than any kind of rationalised interpretations of the text. (Gao 2001a: 158; tr. Gilbert Fong, Gao 2008: 97)

The significance of the work achieves transcendental dimensions: in the introduction to the English translation of the work Gilbert Fong quotes Gao as claiming to want to 'construct a "grand narrative" of the Chinese race,' and 'to have made a significant contribution to Chinese cultural history in purging ideology, politics and moralism from the corrupted myths and returning them to their original purity' (Fong 2008: ix). While one must suspect that the word translated by Fong as 'race' is probably *minzu* (民族), the statements still smack quite a bit of essentialism and appear to differ markedly from the views expressed by Gao a decade earlier in *Xiandai Xiaoshuo Jiqiao Chutan*, as well as in his later vision of cosmopolitan detachment. This element of 'originality, or of a state of culture predating civilisation, is similarly voiced in *Rou zhi Tu*: *Shanhai Jing* comes to symbolise 'pure' and individual imagination, before the straightjacketing of various forms of collectivised ideology (most recently, but not exclusively, socialism). The sense of motion or travel, in turn—the 'exploration' of the wilderness beyond Chinese civilisation—not only powerfully sets off against the comatose disposition of Dai Wei, but forms an antithesis to the stagnation of spiritual life in the midst of the seemingly unhinged mobility of socio-economic reform in the PRC since the 1980s.

Cultural memory and the management of truth

In the context of issues of literary distancing, the most significant marker of difference between the system and the counter-system as it appears today is the freedom to write and publish. The prevalent and institutionalised censorship in the PRC, in addition to the regime's notorious treatment of 'intellectuals' throughout its history, draws a clear line between the 'inside' and the 'outside'—not only in terms of the availability of cultural products, but between imaginary spaces as well. To this effect, the opportunity to 'see clearer' at a distance is also informed by a relatively unrestricted access to information, and thus a heightened 'truth claim,' among the constituents of the counter-system. Significantly, the system is characterised by a monopolisation and management of truth by a centralised state power—as well as the continuous reproduction of this truth in the considering of 'objective facts.' These different forms of 'truth' obviously most clearly manifest themselves in the context of 'sensitive topics,' such as the Anti-Rightist Movement, the Cultural Revolution, Tibet, Xinjiang, and the Tiananmen Incident. As shown above, the latter poses as a

significant factor in the constitution of the exilic subject as well as inscribing the violent symbolic language of the event in terms of finality. As Belinda Kong points out (with reference to Walter Benjamin): the 'representational afterlife' of the Tiananmen Incident has been 'catapulted beyond the nation' and become 'transnational, by necessity:' 'precisely because the topic can be publicly, openly, and directly addressed only outside the PRC, Tiananmen has functioned as a particularly productive node for the diasporic literary imagination' (Kong, B. 2012: 2). In this regard, narratives or evocations of the event participate in the symbolic function of continuously sealing the two systems off from each other.

Ha Jin's poem 'A Child's Nature,' dated 'July 1989,' relates a meeting between the six-year-old Tantan and his parents in San Fransisco [*sic*] Airport. Tantan has travelled alone from Beijing and is greeted in the airport by the poet-I and his wife:

> He told us things in Beijing were in a muddle
> when he had been there for the visa with his uncle:
> 'Lots, lots of hooligans killed soldiers.
> There was a counter-revolutionary fight!'
>
> I couldn't believe my ears and asked:
> 'How come it was "a counter-revolutionary fight?"
> Only the soldiers had guns and tanks
> and they killed people on the streets.'
>
> 'No! Hooligans killed soldiers.
> I saw them rob shops on TV.
> Lots of trucks were smashed and set on fire.
> Grandpa said those were bad eggs
> and they wanted to overthrow the government.'
>
> 'Tantan,' his mother said,
> 'Dad is right. The TV told lies.
> Grandpa doesn't know the truth.
> The People's Army has changed—
> they killed people like us.'
> (Jin 1996: 23)

While distinguishing quite clearly between (our) 'truths' and (their) 'lies,' the poem also links these to forms of representation and the role of the media in the symbolic constitution of events. Michael Berry has described how the Tiananmen Incident was written out of official PRC history only hours after the clearing of the square: on the one hand by silencing witnesses and suppressing any reference to it by the media; and on the other, by producing a counter-narrative of a 'political turmoil incited by a very small number of political careerists,' inciting the destruction of public property and government institutions, with the ultimate purpose of subverting state power (Berry

2008: 300-301).[4] The two competing regimes of knowledge production are distinguished in terms of censorship, but also perform a homogenising act: 'they killed people *like us*.' The killing as well as the censorship extends metonymically to those outside the system: the 'outside' becomes an integrated part of the 'inside.' In its representational language, this appears to be a struggle for 'authenticity.' As Michael Seidel has written in more general terms, '[e]specially if the exile is the result of contingent political circumstances or self-imposed ideological ones, its victim claims to possess the values of his native place, as it were, in proxy—he is the truer version of the place from which he is barred. […] The empowered community, on the other hand, casts the exile as an outlaw, a figure legally or quasi-legally deprived of credentials for a land in which he would, if he could, circulate with impunity' (Seidel 1986: 9). However, as shown above, although Ha Jin has denounced the crackdown in no mistakable terms, he is acutely aware of his inhibited vision and ambivalent about his role as either 'spokesman' or witness; what is interesting, however, is the circumscription of discursive regimes of knowledge, the *system* and *counter-system*: both suffering to some extent or other from impaired vision, but distinguished first and foremost in terms of censorship.

As Ha Jin has pointed out elsewhere, it is not only the approval or disapproval by the GAPP that effectively constitutes censorship; the fear of repercussions combined with a desire to get published result in a situation where not only creative writers, but vast sections of the media and even higher education consciously evade 'sensitive topics' in favour of 'safe' terrain. This type of prevalent self-censorship has unredeemable consequences for China at large: '[r]igid censorship not only chokes artistic talent but also weakens the Chinese populace, who are forced to be less imaginative and less inventive' (jin 2008a: 32). In a personal interview, Ma Jian expressed a similar point of view:

> 我認為一個作家如果內心他不自由的話，我是能看出來的，我一看這篇小說我就知道他胡說八道。他並沒有敢受到自由之後的那個空間，那個寫作的空間。這個空間完全是你自己的，沒有

[4] Berry refers specifically to a widely circulated image of what appears to be a PLA soldier—dead, stripped, and strung to a bus—who had allegedly been killed by the mob, and points to a Taiwanese 'pro-student movement' publication that reveals an inscription on the bus next to the soldier alleging that he killed four people, and the image in the PRC media, covering the inscription and carrying instead a caption that related that he was 'beaten to death by some thugs' and 'disembowelled by a savage rioter' (Berry 2008: 303). Ha Jin's poem employs the same image to draw the outlines of the competing regimes of knowledge and to question the moral difference between the two versions: 'In the hotel I found a copy of *The Times* / and showed him pictures: / […] / a soldier, naked but with his helmet on, / hanged on the window frame of a wrecked bus. / I pointed at the soldier: / "He killed five innocent people / and was caught when he ran out of bullets. / That's why he was hanged like a pig. / Don't you think he deserved it?" // "No." He shook his head. / […] / "Even for that / people shouldn't kill each other' (Jin 1996: 23-24).

> 任何人的校閱，沒有任何人的腳印在這裡走過；完全是你自己，你才能夠感覺到文學的可能性。如果你沒有這種內心的自由的話，你還是受社會、政治、甚至那些遺忘文學的傳統，都會控制你。我這一點覺得是非常重要的；如果我在中國，我恐怕我跟中國官方作家可能也一樣：寫東西很小心，我會知道那些東西不應該寫，我也不敢寫到我的極端。那個「極端」就是我內心裡的一個極端，就是我作偽一條生命我必須走到我自己極端的這個地方，而不是控制自己的能量，控制自己的這個思想，控制自己的想像力。
>
> I believe I am able to tell if a writer does not have inner freedom—one look at the novel, and I will know that he [or she] is talking nonsense. He [or she] simply does not dare to come into contact with the space that comes after freedom, which is the space of writing. This space is entirely your own; there is nobody that reviews it, and there is nobody who has set foot there before. [Only after this space] is entirely your own will you be able to experience the possibilities of literature. If you do not possess this kind of inner freedom, then you are controlled by society, politics, and even those long forgotten literary traditions. I think this is extremely important; if I was in China, I am afraid I would probably act the same as the official writers: I would be very careful with what I wrote; I would know what I was not supposed to write, and I would furthermore not dare to write to my own utmost limit [*jiduan*]. That 'utmost limit' is my own inner limit. In my life, I have to go to the place of my utmost limits, so as not to suppress my own capabilities, suppress my own way of thinking, or suppress my own imaginative power. (Interview conducted in London, 14 June 2012)

Ma Jian's concept of 'inner freedom' is in this sense dependent on 'outer freedom;' writers operating within the Communist literary system are free to write, as long as they do not write what they are not supposed to. Under these conditions, Ma points out, it is absolutely impossible to achieve inner freedom—and thus potentially to gain access to the imaginary and uninhibited 'space of writing.' Salman Rushdie has reasoned, that '[t]he creative act requires not only freedom but also this assumption of freedom. If the creative artist worries if he will still be free tomorrow, then he will not be free today. If he is afraid of the consequences of his choice of subject or of his manner of treatment of it, then his choices will not be determined by his talent, but by fear. If we are not confident of our freedom, then we are not free' (Rushdie 2012). In this lies the key point of criticism against the Communist literary system: it is not that Chinese writers necessarily need to always address the 'sensitive topics' that the state tries to erase from social consciousness, or to continuously counter the official PRC narrative in terms of levels of truth or falsity, but that a writer has to be able to *write without fear*. This fear, or anticipation of censorship (or more severe repercussions), is what stifles the creative act in its infancy; and due to the fact of multiple levels of censorship in the Communist literary system—extending not only to *content* but also to *form* (as seen above)—writers in the PRC have to internalise the political possibilities of literature and intuitively know what they are 'not supposed to write' and erect a psychological mechanism of control within the acceptable political confines, and thus supposedly quite some distance away from ones own 'extreme.'

These issues, in turn, have dire consequences for the development, questioning, or renewal of the Chinese novel inside the Communist literary system into anything but a medium for what Benedict Anderson describes with Walter Benjamin's term 'homogeneous, empty time:' 'a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, […] conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history' (Anderson 1991: 26). In this sense it might be argued, that the contemporary novel in the PRC is only allowed to circulate when it performs a centripetal movement towards the nation and constructs a literary universe in 'homogeneous, empty time' rather than questioning the stability of a 'central' national identity. This incapacity for development within the Communist literary system, in turn, is what makes Milan Kundera deem the novel fundamentally 'incompatible' with the totalitarian universe: an incompatibility that 'is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but *ontological*. […] The world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are moulded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate […] the *spirit of the novel*' (Kundera 2005: 14, tr. Linda Asher).

In the tense dialectic between the system and the counter-system, then, Tiananmen emerges as a literary symbol that points not only towards political silencing, intellectual death, or the 'inauguration of diasporic existence,' but also to the 'space of literature:' the imaginary space essential for the creative process, and a space that can only be defined as 'autonomous.' World literature clearly works as a counter-narrative in this case, and becomes the primary rhetorical device to draw attention to the fundamental impoverishment of spiritual life amidst powerful state-directed narratives of harmony and progress. The fact that some people in China are making more money now than they did twenty years ago simply has no relevance to this argument; neither has the narrative of 'things are getting better:' As Ma Jian commented in connection with a book reading in London in 2009:

> 當一個窮的監獄，跟住在富有的監獄，那當然富有的監獄住起了更舒服。但是極權國家有一個特點：它非常富有但是它沒有安全感。我的意思，中國政府的官員也沒有安全感，因為你都有可能成為一個受害者。
> If you compare China today to the poverty-stricken prison that most Chinese people lived in twenty years ago, of course today's more comfortable prison is preferable. However, it's in the nature of totalitarian regimes that however prosperous you are, one is never able to enjoy any sense of security. Everyone—leaders and people—is aware that at any moment they too could become victims. (London Review 2009)

In its most realised form, then, censorship effectively 'deadens the imagination:' 'Where there is no debate, it is hard to go on remembering, every day, that there is a suppressed side to every argument,' as Rushdie wrote back in 1983. 'It becomes almost impossible to conceive of what the suppressed things might be. It becomes easy to think that what has been suppressed was valueless, anyway, or so dangerous that it needed to be suppressed' (Rushdie 1991: 39). And as he pointed out more recently:

> The Ministry of Truth in present-day China has successfully persuaded a very large part of the Chinese public that the heroes of Tiananmen Square were actually villains bent on the destruction of the nation. This is the final victory of the censor: When people, even people who know they are routinely lied to, cease to be able to imagine what is really the case. (Rushdie 2012)

This is the situation expressed by Tantan's vision in Ha Jin's poem: it was a 'counter-revolutionary fight;' hooligans killed soldiers and robbed shops. The fact that it is a child that expresses this vision of 'truth,' which is also signified in the title of the poem ('A Child's Nature'), should probably not be taken as a representation of adolescent ignorance in a direct sense, but more broadly as an underdeveloped consciousness or 'childish nature'—unable to evolve due to the habitual suppression of the other side to every argument by the 'Ministry of Truth.' It is also significant that it is the older generation that informs Tantan's ignorance: 'Grandpa said those were bad eggs / and they wanted to overthrow the government.' By this token it can be seen as a moral obligation for writers in the counter-system to continuously evoke the Tiananmen Incident to combat the widespread socio-political amnesia—or disinclination to *see*. The imagery of June Fourth thus inscribes itself deeply in the transnational consciousness of Chinese literature in the counter-system. The 'vision in exile' becomes a question of not forgetting. As one line reads in Yang Lian's poem 'Shizong' 失蹤 [Missing] from the poetry cycle 'Huangyan Beihou' 謊言背後 [Behind the Lies]: 'that unacknowledged dying day has to be ever-present, everywhere' (Yang 2008: 32-33, tr. Brian Holton).

Chapter Eight

Distance in Exile: Redefining Concepts of Belonging Outside the PRC

While the previous chapter delineated the symbolic boundaries between the system and counter-system, and pointed to the consequences for publishing and the creative process effected by state censorship, the following will take a closer look at inroads into exile and the counter system. In order to gain a broader perspective on the relationship between exile writing and positioning in the counter-system, it might be useful to look a bit beyond Gao Xingjian's categorical assertion that 'Chinese exile literature has never existed.' As sketched in Chapter Three, the decentralisation of the literary field in the 1930s as a consequence of the Japanese invasion had already spurred a number of writers to exit the Chinese mainland, and the founding of the PRC and implementation of the Communist literary system made writers like Zhang Ailing and Lin Yutang resume their careers abroad. The difference between these writers and the generation exiled after 1989 (at least in the opinion expressed by Gao Xingjian) should be located in questions 'attachment' or 'detachment,' or in other words *distance* to the national subject, as it has been explored throughout the present study. The transnational narrative imagination is hinged to an identification with exile—as a fundamental state for the narrative imagination (and a necessary state in the context of the Communist literary system) and an accumulating 'outer distance' from the constituted centre of the system. In the reassertion of identity abroad, however, the writers are faced with the international literary system—which, as seen, sometimes works against these processes of distancing and subjects the writer to alternative positions of 'immobility.'

Configuration of exile

Exile, in the sense of banishment to the margins of the empire, has played a central role throughout Chinese literary history. Various dynasties sometimes applied this type of punishment to officials who had stepped 'slightly' out of line—not 'significantly' out of line, which would obviously signal much harsher penalties. It was not the common man who was shipped out to some nondescript imperial outpost, but often thinkers, writers, or political advisors; in other words, people who were already writing, and often continued to write and reflect on their changed conditions. The relative leniency of banishment compared to other types of punishment—however intolerable it might have been for a 'civilised gentleman' of the court to live among 'barbarous' tribes on the frontier—also to some extent implied a hope for political exoneration and an eventual return to the capital. Various types of writing arose from these experiences: diaries, travel writing, political essays, as well as poetry. The *locus classicus* in this later instance might be found in the *Chu Ci*, which contains among other works the 'first great masterpiece of Chinese exile literature' (Chang and Owen 2010: 43), 'Lisao' 離騷 [Encountering sorrow], traditionally attributed to Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 339-278 BC). In 'Lisao,' the poet is ousted from the capital of Chu for what seems to be unfair reasons, and goes on a mad spiritual journey to the heavens and the 'four corners or the world,' although without ever forgetting his home:

> 已矣哉
> 國無人莫我知兮，又何懷乎古都
> 既莫足與為美政兮，吾將從彭咸之所居
> Enough! There are no true men in the state: no one to understand me.
> Why should I cleave to the city of my birth?
> Since none is worthy to work with in making good government,
> I will go and join P'eng Hsien [Peng Xian] in the place where he abides.
> (*Chu Ci* 2007: 35; tr. David Hawkes, Hawkes 1959: 34)

What is evident in these lines, and characteristic for classical Chinese exile poetry (which, as seen in Chapter Five, was also the case in classical geography and travel writing) is a distinct sense of a centre-periphery dichotomy, and a longing to return 'home' to this centre—not to *escape beyond*. There is a clear sense of having been wronged by incompetent functionaries in the government and a yearning to go back and settle scores. In this regard, Claudio Guillén has pointed to a parallel between classical Greek and classical Chinese poetry of exile:

> In both civilisations the archetypes of the literature of exile were produced within the framework of an *imperium mundi* based not only on growing imperial power but on absolute confidence in the

> superiority of a single centralised culture: a blend of imperialism and culturalism which the exiled writers themselves, on a conceptual and emotional level, largely shared. In both cases the basic dimensions and symbols of exile could be considered the *circle* and the *centre*; and even when the causes of banishment were political, its consequences were frighteningly cultural, for to be expelled from the centre of the circle amounted to the danger of being hurled into void or doomed to non-being (Guillén 1976: 275).

This paradigm of a centralised 'home' and its antithesis of the peripheral 'void' or 'non-being' has obviously been displaced considerably with the rise of modern nation states. For the late Qing reformers, the situation was not so clear-cut. For one thing, they travelled much farther: when Kang Youwei fled China after the Hundred Days' Reform in 1898, he went through Japan, Canada, USA, Mexico, Europe, India, and Singapore, before eventually returning to China in 1913. More importantly, and what surely also to varying degrees informed Kang's specific itinerary, was the fact that China was not the only centre in the world anymore: whereas 'the Central Kingdom' still to some extent constituted a 'spiritual' centre for many of these writers, it had slowly been relegated to the periphery in terms of material development and social organisation. The majority of the writing produced by the Wuxu generation of exiles was political or philosophical in nature, or had the purpose of 'collecting information' on foreign cultures and societies. Some of the writers who went abroad after the Xinhai Revolution, such as Yu Dafu, were not afraid of evoking an 'exilic' narrative framework despite the fact that they were often abroad on voluntary basis. Consequently, these writers were dismissed by Gao Xingjian as not 'properly' in exile: 'the homeland was always in their dreams.' Obviously, then, there exist various degrees of displacement in literature, which is based on different levels of attachment and detachment to a constituted 'home.'

Lin Yutang is probably the most prominent among the 'few writers' mentioned by Gao Xingjian, who went abroad to live and write, but never participated in the gathering of a 'current' in the same way as the post-1989 exiles. Lin had performed the conventional *rite de passage* in early Republican literary history and gone abroad on a scholarship in 1919 to earn an MA from Harvard (1922) and a Ph.D. from Leipzig (1923), which ensured a position at Peking University upon his return to China. Although his career at the university was short, he quickly established himself as an editor, critic, and translator, and founded the bi-monthly literary journal *Lunyu* 論語 [Analects] in 1932, and spearheaded the literary society of the same name.[1]

[1] On the *Lunyu* society and Lin's involvement in it, see Laughlin 2008.

At the time when discussions of the 'third category' started to emerge in the early 1930s, Lin did not, as the Shi Zhecun camp, reach out to world literary space for concepts of the autonomy of writing, but rather went in search of a cosmopolitan literary identity that was, however, still framed in the nationalist discourse known from Hu Shi. In the essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,' published in the Shanghai-based Anglophone journal *The China Critic* (January 1930), Lin Yutang claims that 'we may characterise our culture as a critical culture. This culture does not belong to any nation, but to the modern world as a whole, in which all nations are members of the world republic of letters and of thought' (quoted in Qian 2011: 78-79). This 'critical culture' gained a decidedly more nationalist edge in his first book-length publication in English *My Country and My People* from 1935. In the introduction to the 1936 edition, Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973)—who had previously written the hugely successful novel *The Good Earth* (1931) and was to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938—emphasises the importance of the fact that it is a book about China written by a *Chinese writer*; however, not any kind of Chinese writer:

> None but a Chinese could write such a book, and I had begun to think that as yet even no Chinese could write it, because it seemed impossible to find a modern English-writing Chinese who was not so detached from his own people as to be alien to them, and yet detached enough to comprehend their meaning, the meaning of their age and the meaning of their youth. (Buck 1936: xi)

Only a cosmopolitan like Lin, it is implied, is able to navigate the delicate balance between 'attachment' and 'detachment.' Furthermore, it is essential that it is a *Chinese* cosmopolitan, which Lin also corroborates, somewhat rigidly, in the book's Prologue, where particularly the 'Old China Hand' is reproached for speaking about China without being able to speak with the Chinese.[2] However, he also ventures into a strangely pseudo-racist argument for the better qualification of a Chinese person to speak about China in that 'he has a distinct advantage over the foreign observer:'

> For he is a Chinese, and as a Chinese, he not only sees with his mind but he also feels with his heart, and he knows that the blood, surging in his veins in tides of pride and shame, is Chinese blood, a mystery of mysteries which carries within its bio-chemical constitution the past and the future of China, bearer of all its pride and shame and of all its glories and iniquities. (Lin 1936: 13)

In 1936 Lin unwittingly initiated his exile proper, when he went on what he believed was to be a one-year stay in the United States. While the onset of the Sino-Japanese War initially complicated a

[2] Lin's opinion of the Old China Hand as cultural interlocutor is sarcastic at best: 'Can China be understood merely through pidgin English? Is the Old China Hand to pick up an understanding of the soul of China from his cook and amah? Or shall it be from his Number One Boy? Or shall it be from his compradore and shroff, or by reading the correspondence of the *North-China Daily News*?' (Lin 1936: 7). Lin continues his treatment of the Old China Hand for the next five pages.

permanent return to China, the Communist takeover in 1949 made his exile definitive, and from this point on he never again set foot in his homeland. From his hiatus in exile, however, Lin Yutang steadily established his name as one of the first Chinese writers to successfully cross into 'international literary space' in the early twentieth century. While he had been active in literary circles in China before the war and continued to be a presence (in writing if not in person) on the national scene until 1949, his fluency in English and intimacy with what soon became 'Red China' in the eyes of most of the rest of the world made him an eligible cultural interlocutor across the Pacific—but naturally unacceptable to the progressively xenophobic PRC administration during the revolutionary decades. What Gao Xingjian alluded to in his assessment of this generation of writers, was probably that despite Lin's cosmopolitanism and international renown, his literary efforts continued to place China at its centre; not only were his themes national in character, his narrative integrity—in fiction, philosophy, and social critique—was conditioned by his identity as a Chinese writer. In this regard, Edward Said has alerted us to the intimate relationship between exile and nationalism, and posits that one in fact cannot be discussed without the other: being dialectically opposed in terms of *continuity* and *discontinuity*, 'both terms include everything from the most collective of collective sentiments to the most private of private emotions, there is hardly language adequate for both' (Said 2000: 177). The perfect balance between 'attachment' and 'detachment' that Buck describes has certainly also come to characterise Lin Yutang's writing; although he has often been seen, such as Gao does, as tending towards the former.

In the essay 'The Spokesman and the Tripe,' Ha Jin describes how Lin Yutang saw himself as a 'spokesman' for the Chinese people after he came to the United States, and that this 'view of himself as a cultural ambassador more or less determined the nature and even the quality of his writings' (Jin 2008b: 14). Jin regards this feature as in various ways inhibiting to Lin Yutang's writing, but also one that largely informed his popularity among the American readership and, crucially, one that he was able to translate into a form of political empowerment. As Ha Jin relates, when the Sino-Japanese War broke out, Lin started to publish widely in major American newspapers to campaign for opposition to the war and 'even drastically revised the last chapter of *My Country and My People* […] to make it more suitable for the united Chinese efforts to resist the Japanese invasion' (ibid), and managed, on account of his literary reputation, to gather support among the American public: 'At the time, few Chinese officials in the United States had access to the public media, so Lin Yutang literally became a spokesman for China. His public role was acknowledged by the fact that, during his half a year's visit to China in 1944, President Chiang Kai-

shek and Madame Chiang received him no fewer that six times' (ibid). This predicament naturally also ensured a ban on Lin's works on the Chinese mainland after 1949.

In this context it is obviously interesting to note that Lin Yutang has become something of a bestseller in the PRC today, and that complete sets of Chinese translations of his works are available in any Xinhua Bookstore across the country.[3] Ha Jin concludes that 'it was his literary writings that met some cultural need of the newly opening China and thus paved the way for his return. Only through literature is a genuine return possible for the exiled writer' (Jin 2008b: 21). It is clear that this 'cultural need' was sustained by how well Lin's 'cosmopolitan nationalism' fitted the contemporaneous political programme of the CCP leadership—despite the strong support for their antagonists, the KMT regime. As evidenced at least in *My Country and My People*, Lin Yutang regarded himself as a metonymic representation of China, with 'Chinese blood' running through his veins—blood, 'which carries within its bio-chemical constitution the past and the future of China, bearer of all its pride and shame and of all its glories and iniquities' (Lin 1936: 13). In this regard, he had exerted exactly the form of international 'soft power' that the PRC leadership increasingly craved by the mid-1990s; and insofar as he had never abandoned his burning nationalism (tending towards attachment rather than detachment), it would seem only logical to forgive his former political demeanours and rein in his literary merits as symbolic capital, or 'soft power,' for the Chinese state.

In the 'Chuban Shuoming' 出版說明 [Announcement from the publisher] to a 2009 mainland republication of his works in English it is related, that

> 林語堂的作品如同他的一生，孜孜地向世界解說中國，向祖國表達赤忱。選擇林語堂的作品重印出版，首先是因為他向西方介紹中國文化的貢獻。作偽用外語創作的一位中國作家，他的系列作品影響深遠，被視作闡述東方思想的重要著述。其次，還因為他非凡的文學造詣，作偽國際筆會的副會長，並獲諾貝爾文學獎的提名，林語堂贏得了世界文壇的尊重，也為中國人贏得了驕傲。
>
> Lin Yutang's works, like his entire life, meticulously explain China to the world and show respect for the motherland. The choice to republish Lin Yutang's works has first of all been based on the contribution he has made in introducing Chinese culture to the west. Being a Chinese writer who wrote in a foreign language, his series of titles has had a profound impact, and is regarded as an important source in the dissemination of eastern thinking. Secondly, it is also due to his outstanding literary achievements: having served as vice chairman in International PEN and been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Lin Yutang has won respect on the world literary scene, and has also won pride for the Chinese people. (Lin 2009: first page, n.p.)

[3] His *Collected Works* were published in Chinese in 1994. See also Qian 2011: 1-22.

It is obviously interesting to note that the publisher foregrounds Lin's function as cultural interlocutor with 'the west' on behalf of his achievements in literature, and it is perhaps even more striking that these achievements are indirectly taken credit for by 'the Chinese people'—but then again, Lin had the blood of this entire people running through his veins. What is most interesting, however, is the nature of the consecrating authorities made to define Lin's literary achievements: the Nobel Prize Committee and International PEN—two of the supposedly most autonomous organisations in world literary space. The association with these institutions provides *cultural* capital, as opposed to *political* or *economic* capital, and insofar as the editor is able to convincingly revert this onto China and 'the Chinese people,' it appears to constitute 'soft power' in its most desirable and distilled form: a Chinese nationalist narrative sanctioned by the consecrating authorities of the World Republic of Letters.

Ha Jin, on the other hand, has yet to experience such generous gestures from the CCP—despite significant international renown.[4] Unlike Lin Yutang, Jin did not establish himself as a writer before leaving China for the US on a scholarship in 1985, but like Lin, he has established himself as a Chinese writer who writes in English about China with critical success outside China. Ha Jin admits that, when he published his first poetry collection in the States, he harboured ambitions of being a 'spokesman' for his people just as Lin had been:[5]

> When I began to write, I longed to return to China, and I saw my stay in the United States as a sojourn, so it felt almost natural for me to claim to be something of a spokesman for the unfortunate Chinese. Little did I know that such a claim could be so groundless. At any moment, a country can take a writer to task and even accuse him of misdeeds, betrayal, or other crimes against his people. (Jin 2008b: 4)

Although Lin Yutang allegedly regretted the fact that he was not able to meet his Chinese readers 'face to face' (Lin 2009: vii), but had to rely instead on translations, it seems that he—given his background in Chinese letters—was able to simultaneously 'straddle' two literary spaces to a larger extent than Ha Jin; not, as the conventional narrative goes, two imaginary and ideologically laden cultural spaces ('Chinese culture' and 'western culture'), but concrete literary and linguistic spaces framed in issues of nationality and subject to change over time. Ha Jin appears to sell well in both English and Chinese translation in Taiwan and Hong Kong and is the focus of academic and public

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[4] Ha Jin has been awarded the National Book Award in 1999 for the novel *Waiting* (1999), and the PEN/Faulkner Award in 2000, also for *Waiting*, and again in 2005 for the novel *War Trash* (2004).

[5] In the Preface to *Between Silences* from 1990, Ha Jin writes: 'As a fortunate one I speak for those unfortunate people who suffered, endured or perished at the bottom of life and who created the history and at the same time were fooled or ruined by it. […] If not every one of these people, who were never perfect, is worthy of our love, at least their fate deserves our attention and our memory. They should talk and should be talked about' (Jin 1990: 2).

discussion alike; however, unlike Lin, he has never interacted directly with these spaces in the Chinese language. Jin is not blind to this dissimilarity, in fact he considers it a conscious and necessary choice: 'In retrospect, I can see that my decision to leave contemporary China in my writing is a way to negate the role of spokesmanship I used to envision for myself. I must learn to stand alone, as a writer' (Jin 2008b: 28).[6]

Ha Jin draws the distinction between himself and Lin Yutang using the concepts 'exile' and 'immigrant' to devise the outer poles in the experience of a displaced writer. Whereas Lin always tended towards the exilic—which allegedly eased his rebirth on the mainland in the late 1980s—Jin perceives himself as having made a transition from, predominantly, an 'exile' to an 'immigrant' writer. Ha Jin's efforts are thus supposedly no longer directed at China; by abandoning his 'spokesmanship'—or rather: negotiated the *distance* between the 'immigrant' and 'exile' features of his literary identity (which does not constitute actual *abandonment*)—he has gained access to 'a publishing market in which translated fiction from China barely has an audience, […] [and] found his way into the hearts and bookcases of Anglophone readers like no other Chinese-born novelist' (quote from *Guardian* on back-sleeve of *The Writer as Migrant*). In so doing, Ha Jin has completed 'a trajectory that has established him as one of the most admired exemplars of world literature' (ibid, inner sleeve).

Ha Jin's reasoning for his 'exile to English' is seemingly straightforward: 'if I wrote in Chinese, my audience would be in China and I would therefore have to publish there and be at the mercy of its censorship. To preserve the integrity of my work, I had no choice but to write in English' (Jin 2009). But the 'choice' of freedom, as already discussed, might also lead to erasure—not only from the files in the Communist literary system, but also from affiliation with the exile community of mainland writers and the transnational 'counter-system' of Chinese literary space. As Ha Jin commented in an interview upon being questioned about his participation in the Chinese-language press in the United States: 'Languages are like fences—English seems to have walled me into a different territory' (Kellman 2003: 82). His literary search away from the narrative position of the 'exile' towards the 'immigrant' corroborates this assertion.

It is clear, as the *Guardian* quote also expresses, that the situation is significantly different for writers who continue to write in Chinese. Others might not as easily fluctuate between linguistic registers, but might require a slow transitional process or close reliance on translators. Gao Xingjian, for instance, has only recently begun to seriously flirt with the literary language of his

[6] Jin has recently revisited 'historical China' in the novel *Nanjing Requiem* (2011).

assumed national identity; at the time he received the Nobel Prize his works in fiction had all been composed in Chinese—and despite the efforts of willing translators (efforts that naturally increased and expanded after the award) only a slim selection of works were available to an international audience at the time of the award.[7] Since the late 1980s, Gao's works have been prohibited in the PRC, which naturally drastically reduces the readership of the Chinese editions, and what was most extraordinary about the 2000 Nobel Prize for literature was that it was probably the first time in recent history that international access to a laureate's work had been so limited prior to the announcement. This naturally changed afterwards, and he is now available—as other laureates—in a wide variety of languages and locations; the fact remains, however, that at the time of the award, Gao was in exile from China but also on the margins of world literary space: quite unlike English, Chinese remains a minority language if one aspires to become an 'admired' exemplar of world literature.

In a recent interview in *The New York Times*, Gao Xingjian—when questioned about his relationship to Chinese literature—answered, that 'I'm lucky to have had three lives: The first was in China; the second in exile; and the third in France. […] I am a French writer with a French passport. I am a citizen of the world. For me, national borders are meaningless' (cited in Lau 2012). In quite a few places, however, Gao Xingjian is still thought of—as are Ma Jian, Bei Dao, and other exiled writers of the same generation—as a Chinese 'dissident writer.' Some scholars have even argued that this is what landed him the Nobel Prize in the first place (see Chapter One). Despite continuous efforts to disentangle himself from the national narrative in search of a 'pure' literary language—or a 'cold literature' (冷的文學), as he has called it on several occasions since 1990[8]—the 'dissident' label has largely been the determining factor in the assessment of his writing since the late 1980s (both inside and outside China). In addition to adding a third 'exilic' space (the counter-system) to Casanova's model, two more things are interesting in the above quote: one is the explicit sense of *progression* (from China, to exile, to France) and the other is that France, in this scheme, appears to coincide with 'the world' to an extent that is clearly not the case with China.

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[7] Gao has produced a number of plays in French, and has also translated some of these into Chinese and others into French; see: Conceison 2009.

[8] Gao expounded this concept in the short, manifesto-like essay 'Wo Zhuzhang yizhong Lengde Wenxue' 我主張一種冷的文學 [I advocate a form of cold literature] from 1990, and has frequently quoted from it since—for instance in his Nobel Prize lecture: 'It may therefore be said that cold literature entails fleeing in order to survive; it is literature that refuses to be strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation. I also believe that if a race [*minzu*] cannot accommodate this non-utilitarian sort of literature it is not merely a misfortune for the writer but also an indication of the utter spiritual impoverishment of that race' (Gao 1996: 20; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2007b: 81).

The fact, it seems, that Gao is able to conceive of himself as 'a citizen of the world' is hinged to this idea of 'progression' (or cosmopolitanisation)—a progression that is constantly checked by the 'exile' and 'immigrant' forces described by Ha Jin.

In 'Zhongguo Liuwangwenxue de Kunjing' from 1992, Gao proposed a different solution to Ha Jian's dilemma of being 'exiled to English.'

> 我所以甘心流亡，毋需迴避，只因為尋求表述的自由。我表述，我才存在。我非常清楚我現今的作品，除了國內國外若干朋友和幾位研究中國文學的西方學者之外，讀者寥寥。倘得以翻譯出版，只能說承蒙厚愛。我一本《靈山》寫了七年，稿費不及我寫這書化掉的煙錢。台灣的出版社來的結賬單註明，一年來只賣掉九十二冊。我講的是事實，並且不認為這有什麼不好。我甚至認為這更接近文學的本性。
>
> The reason that I am reconciled with exile and have no need to try and escape it, is simply due to a search for the freedom of expression. I express my self therefore I exist. I am acutely aware of the fact, that besides some domestic and overseas [*guonei guowai*] friends and a few western scholars doing research on Chinese literature, the readers of my work these days are few and far between. If [one] happens to be published in translation, [one] can only express [one's] deep-felt gratitude. I spent seven years writing *Soul Mountain*, and the royalties did not exceed the money I spent on cigarettes writing the book. The account settlement from the Taiwanese publisher clearly specified that in one year it had only sold 92 copies. This is the truth. However, I do not think that there is anything wrong with that; in fact I think that this is even closer to the essence of literature. (Gao 1996: 111)

Although Gao could not have predicted at this point, that, twenty years on, he would start to refer to himself as a 'French writer,' his idea of exile in 1992 seems to pose a significant contrast to Ha Jin's. Ha Jin's argument for choosing English as literary language was, as he stated, due to concerns of readership—if he wrote in Chinese, his audience would be in China. This, apparently, does not worry Gao Xingjian: to him, the 'essence of literature' is the key issue, not whether or not one is read, and *where* one is read. To Gao Xingjian, it seems, readers are only a necessary evil for literature; meaning supposedly only arises between a writer and his or her cultural tradition. Although this disposition certainly accounts for quite a number of passages in *Lingshan*, it does not contribute significantly to an understanding of the exilic narrative perspective—except in an abstract, deductive sense. Both writers perceive of a 'home in language:' when language is made the exclusive servant of totalitarian politics it loses its expressive power and becomes a tool of oppression; but whereas Jin lets himself be 'exiled to English' to escape this repression, Gao continues to fight this language from the inside, as he put it in a conversation with Yang Lian from

1993:[9] to '*create our own Chinese literary language*, without refusing to let ourselves be enriched by classical Chinese, but also without letting ourselves be inhibited by it' (Gao 1996: 133, my italics).

Gao Xingjian and Ha Jin can in this sense be seen as proposing different solutions to the circumvention of the 'exilic space' of Chinese writing. Although neither of them have been able to (or allowed to) perform the 'complete' transition, they have both consolidated themselves in international literary space by deliberate acts of distancing from the literary canons of the People's Republic and the eventual adoption of a new literary language (French and English) which, in Casanova's vocabulary at least, possess higher degrees of 'literariness' in the World Republic of Letters. The most significant difference, besides those already described, lies in terms of the actual condition of 'exile' and the degrees of attachment and detachment to national literature in the PRC. In the eyes of the CCP, both became 'foreigners' long ago; and after the events on June Fourth 1989, and in the light of the significance of literature in modern Chinese political history described throughout the preceding chapters, there seemed to be no way back.

Conditions of exile: the concepts of 'home' and 'distance'

Ha Jin's *Waiting* and Gao Xingjian's *Yige Ren de Shengjing* were both initially published in 1999, a decade after the events that made the two writers renounce all formal ties with the regime and supposedly while they still, according to their own reasoning, were predominantly 'exile writers.' Although significantly different in form, structure, and tone, both novels employ a *narrative present* through which to relate a *narrative past* that mainly revolves around the repression of individual freedom during the Cultural Revolution in China. As mentioned in Chapter One, narratives set in this period have come to be a well-known phenomenon: the revolutionary years offer a vast repository of resources that adapt only too well to narrative fiction, and insofar as critique is not extended to the current system of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' or the Communist Party itself, it is even highly marketable within the PRC—regardless of any assessment by the *Global Times* or other biased opinion-makers.

[9] The conversation has been published under the name 'Liuwang shi Women Huode Shenme?' 流亡使我們獲得什麼 [What have we gained from exile?] (Gao 1996: 116-155), and partially translated into English as 'The Language of Exile' (Gao and Yang 2002).

The representation of the existential conflict in the *narrative pasts* is remarkably similar in the two novels: it is a condition characterised by the capitulation of individual integrity in the face of group tyranny. Although the eradication of individual agency plays different roles in the two narratives, it is enforced through the same ethos: ideological indoctrination, forms of enforced displacement or 'exile' and, perhaps most significantly, *surveillance*. Conversely, it is the *narrative presents* that frame these accounts that most significantly distinguish the 'attachment' to the narrative of 'China' in the two novels. Most notably, the structural employment of the narrative present is radically different: while temporality in Gao's novel jumps from each chapter to the next, the narrative present in *Waiting* is more conventionally located in a prologue and the final third ('Part 3') of the work, and relies on a largely chronological time-frame to connect these temporalities; the most significant divergence, however, is in the *relation* of the narrative present to the narrative past: the forces that either drive the two temporalities together, or tear them apart.

The conflict in the narrative past in *Waiting* can be boiled down to an 'emotional exile' imposed by the state and enforced by the masses, where individual freedom (the freedom to love and marry) is denied not only by the Party but also by repressive aspects of Chinese tradition (the enforced marriage to a wife with bound feet) and is held up to constant scrutiny by the watchful eye of the collective. In territorial terms it is also an exile for the protagonists, insofar as both of them have been forced to leave their native homes and join an army hospital in Muji City—the male protagonist, Lin Kong, even leaving his wife and a daughter behind at their native Goose Village. When Lin is finally able, after eighteen years of *waiting*, to divorce his peasant wife (but also to secure an urban residence permit for her and their daughter) and marry instead his city girlfriend Manna Wu, it represents not only an end to his 'emotional exile' but also a sort of unexpected 'homecoming'—played out in the final pages of the book, where Lin suddenly discovers an affection for his former wife and daughter that he had never known before: 'one thing he was certain about now: between love and peace of mind he would choose the latter. He would prefer a peaceful home. What was better than a place where you could sit down comfortably, read a book, and have a good meal and an unbroken sleep?' (Jin 2000: 303).

Despite the disjointed temporality in *Yige Ren de Shengjing*, the narrative past parallels the one in *Waiting* to a significant extent. As in Ha Jin's novel, the protagonist is swept up in the general mayhem of Mao's great revolution despite the fact that he, like Lin Kong and Manna Wu, tries to remain on the periphery of the politicised masses. The reason this is not entirely possible is due to issues of 'surveillance'—which achieves an absolute nature under Maoism: one never knows

when one is being watched and by whom, but the very possibility instils a constant paranoia and one gradually begins to watch one self—to 'self-censure.' Even at the point when Manna Wu relates to Lin Kong that she has been raped by an officer they both formally considered a mutual friend, Lin is still inhibited from expressing even the slightest emotion out of fear of being watched and judged by the collective:

> He wanted to hold her in his arms and comfort her, but they were in the presence of seven or eight soldiers, who were whistling deliberately while shovelling snow on the sidewalk thirty yards away. Remaining where he was, Lin managed to say, 'I'm afraid you may need medical help. You look very ill, Manna.' (ibid: 192)

The same basic conflict is evident in the narrative past in *Yige Ren de Shengjing*: the repressed individual potential in the face of totalitarian dictatorship and the psychological impoverishment that ensues from life under the watchful eyes of the Party and the masses:

> 他需要一個窩，一個棲身之處，一個可以躲避他人，可以有個隱私而不受監視的家。他需要一間隔音的房間，關起門來，可以大聲說話，不至於被人聽見，想說什麼就說什麼，一個可以出聲思想他人的天地。他不能再包在繭里，像個無聲息的蛹，他得生活，感受，也包括同女人盡興做愛，呻吟或叫喊。他得力爭個生存空間，再也忍受不了這許多年的壓抑，也包括重新醒覺的慾望，都不能不有個地方發泄。
>
> He needed a nest, a refuge, he needed a home where he could be away from people, where he could have privacy as an individual and not be observed. He needed a soundproof room where he could shut the door and talk loudly without being heard so that he could say whatever he wanted to say, a domain where he as an individual could voice his thoughts. He could no longer be wrapped in a cocoon like a silent larva. He had to live and to experience, be able to groan or howl as he made wild love with a woman. He had to get a space to exist, he could no longer endure those years of repression, and he needed somewhere to discharge his reawakened lust. (Gao 2000b: 18; tr. Mabel Lee, Gao 2002b: 17)

Certainly 'lust,' rather than love, drives the protagonist in Gao's novel; but the 'emotional exile' runs parallel in terms of the source of its repression: the panoptic vision of the centralised state. The deprivation of emotional life during the Cultural Revolution is also conferred on literature in both novels: illegal volumes of translated foreign works are stored and exchanged on the sly between the characters, and supply the only emotional link to a world beyond Socialism. Naturally only the Maoist canon is displayed on the bookshelves; consequences were obviously dire if one were to be caught in the possession of pretty much anything else.

In *Waiting*, after Lin and Manna are married, and Manna has given birth to two boys, the twins fall ill with dysentery. The repository of modern medical science is explored but nothing seems to cure them. They appear to be on the verge of death, when Lin's daughter of the first

marriage, Hua, proposes a folk remedy of their native community (the narrative past): 'Mother said you should feed them some mashed taro mixed with white sugar and egg yolk' (Jin 2000: 281-282).

> Though still doubtful, without delay Lin bought five pounds of taros from a vegetable shop and prepared the folk remedy. The twins enjoyed eating the mashed taro, opening their mouths like baby swallows receiving food from the mother bird. To everyone's amazement, that very night the babies stopped defecating. Within two days they began to urinate normally. Many doctors and nurses harboured misgivings about folk remedies, but this time everybody was impressed. (ibid: 282)

The two narrative levels appear thus to seamlessly join hands: not only are the contradictions between the narrative past and present resolved, it appears that their counter-positioning was always only an illusion. The past is made to serve the present, and the present the past; and this temporal 'fusing' promises an at least tolerable prospect for the future.

There is no 'homecoming' in Gao's novel though; the narrative present is sliced up into fragmentary images from life in exile—from Paris to Hong Kong, Stockholm, New York, and various other nondescript places around the world: 'A friend you have just met at the Mediterranean Literary Centre asks if you get homesick, and you reply categorically that you do not. You say that you had cut off those feelings long ago, completely!' (Gao 2000b: 440; 2002b: 443). There are opportunities neither for physical nor emotional reconciliation, no 'peace of mind' as in *Waiting*. The 'you' of the narrative present seems to be desperate to distance himself from the 'he' of the past:

> 你與他彼此也形同路人，你既不是他的同志，也不是他的法官，又不是他終極的良心，那良心還不知為何物，只不過由你對他加以一番關照，你同他這時間和環境的錯位造成了距離，你占了時間和地點的便易，便有了距離，也即自由，可以從容觀省他，而他作偽個自在之物，其實那煩惱也是自找。
>
> You and he became fellow travellers, but you are neither his comrade nor his judge, nor are you his ultimate conscious mind, whatever that may be. You simply care about him. For you and for him, the interstices of time and circumstances provided *distance*, although you have had the advantage of time and location. With that *distance*—in other words, *freedom*—you were able to observe him at leisure. He was a spontaneous being, and his sufferings, in fact, were self-inflicted. (ibid: 438; 441, my italics)

The distancing between these narrative temporalities inevitably also points to a psychological distancing. The German translator of *Yige Ren de Shengjing*, Natascha Gentz, defines a 'temporal rupture,' that 'obstructs the narrating self's identification with the experiencing self of the past:' 'What might seem a confusing mixture of subjective perspectives to some readers is instead a deliberate narrative technique to approach a historical subject through present reflections, a

translation and actualisation of the past self in the present through a hermeneutic dialogue' (Gentz 2006: 125).[10]

The alienation experienced by the exiled writer is in this way inscribed throughout the narrative of *Yige Ren de Shengjing*. The primary focus of the novel becomes the 'detachment,' or *distancing*, between the two narrative temporalities rather than either the past or the present in their own rights. Although the latter seems to be desperate to separate itself from the former, they are, by being mirror-inversions of each other, inevitably intertwined. Gentz points to the fact that the novel has been criticised for the 'lack of individual voices' besides that of the protagonist himself, but that 'this reduction of persons to stock characters again appears as a specific strategic devise to fully develop the protagonist and his character as the main hero' (ibid: 128). But in fact the protagonist—or, rather, protagonist*s*—is not developed as a character either, and certainly not as a 'hero:' besides a phallic inferiority complex and displeasure with Communist politics, there are no deeper structures to the psychology or discernable character development.[11] Both the 'he' of the past and the 'you' of the present are situated somewhere between a misogynist and an existentialist in search of individual liberty; there is no challenge to this identity construction, no psychological probing, synthesis or compromise. Development occurs only in terms of the *distancing* between the narrative past and the narrative present (and the subjectivities that sustain these temporalities), and points in this sense beyond the text itself—to the narrator, and ultimately the writer, who, due to the strong autobiographical nature of the work, cannot escape getting his hands tainted in the process. 'Distance in space reinforces the effect of distance in time,' writes Andrew Gurr. 'Physical departure from the scene of one's personal history provides a break in time and separates the present from the past. […] In consequence of this separation from home in space as well as in time, the writer characteristically centres his attention not so much on his sense of his history […], as on his sense of home as a unit in space and time together' (Gurr 1981: 10-11). The temporal separation evidenced in Gao's novel becomes a distancing from 'home'—but also a construction of this home 'as a unit in space and time together.' The temporal separation signals an insistence on 'homelessness' as the driving narrative factor and the concept of 'time' turns into a metaphor for the act of distancing. In *Waiting*, on the other hand, the smooth transition from the narrative past to

[10] Or in the words of Gao's narrator: 'His experiences have silted up in the creases of your memory. How can they be stripped off in layers, coherently arranged and scanned, so that a pair of detached eyes can observe what he had experienced? You are you and he is he. It is difficult for you to return to how it was in his mind in those times, he has already become so unfamiliar' (Gao 2000b: 186; 2002b: 182; Gentz 2006: 125).

[11] Carlos Rojas has argued that the explicitly patriarchal vision in *Yige Ren de Shengjing* constitutes a significant 'blind spot' in Gao's dissociation from all 'isms' and self-styling as a cosmopolitan intellectual (Rojas 2002).

the narrative present also reduces the 'psychological distance' between the two narrative levels. Ha Jin, it might seem, has already found this *distance* in language (by being 'exiled to English'), and is perhaps able to more comfortably gloss over the existential conflict of home and belonging, and facilitate a peaceful—if not unambiguous—'homecoming.'

Guillén, in the paper discussed at the beginning of this chapter, suggested that literary responses to exile might be construed within two main 'poles:' the pole of 'exile,' in the strictest sense, where 'exile becomes its own subject matter;' and the pole of 'counter-exile,' where 'exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterised by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism' (Guillén 1976: 272). While the former tends toward 'the direct or near-autobiographical conveyance of actual experiences of exile by means of emotions reflecting the experiences or of attitudes developed toward them,' the latter tends toward 'the imaginative presentation of relatively fictional themes, ancient myths or proposed ideas and beliefs growing from what are essentially the consequences in the changing writer, or group of writers, of the initial experiences' (ibid: 271-272). Applying this terminology to the present case, *Waiting* obviously tends toward the pole of 'counter-exile:' favouring 'integration' over disintegration, and proposing a largely imaginative response to the condition of exile. *Yige Ren de Shengjing*, on the other hand, clearly points toward the pole where 'exile becomes its own subject matter:' it vividly illustrates the 'mutilations' of exile (Said 2000: 175), but also its positive benefits—what Said defines as a 'contrapuntal awareness:'

> Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is *contrapuntal*. (ibid: 186)[12]

Said's concept is useful to the description of the narrative frame in both novels: both Ha Jin and Gao Xingjian employ a 'necessary elsewhere' in the narration of the 'here' and showcase the contrapuntal awareness as a temporal lack between 'now' and 'then.' The incorporation of 'simultaneous dimensions' displaces 'homogeneous, empty time,' and inscribes the transnational imagination at the centre of the narrative. While the contrapuntal motion in both novels seems 'contrary' (or perhaps 'oblique'), to stay with Said's musical metaphor, there appears in *Yige Ren*

[12] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said applies the concept of 'contrapuntal reading' in the engagement with colonial texts as 'a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts' (Said 1994: 51): 'contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded' (ibid: 66-67).

de Shengjing a drive towards dissonance, while *Waiting* seems to strive to maintain harmony—to an extent where each melodic line becomes indistinguishable from the whole. Gao's work seeks to constantly challenge this implied harmonic structure, but whereas his earlier work *Lingshan* presented a dissonant polyphony of voices, the later work maintains a contrapuntal motion of the 'here' and the 'elsewhere.'

Emplacement in exile

Different parameters have so far been set up for the situatedness of Chinese exile writing in international literary space. For one thing, the 'current' generated by the political and symbolic implications of June Fourth recounted in the previous chapter has, according to Gao Xingjian, a more legitimate claim to an 'exilic' literary identity than previous generations (such as Lin Yutang or Zhang Ailing), who were 'never more than sojourners in an alien land.' Ha Jin chooses not to opt for this grand narrative, but relies instead on the division between the 'immigrant' and the 'exile' writer. They seem to propose conflicting definitions of the concept of 'exile'—or rather: exile and '*liuwang*' (流亡), which are not necessarily corresponding concepts.[13] In Gao's terminology, the *liuwang* possesses a higher degree of autonomy than the 'sojourner;' to Ha Jin, however, this distinction is largely overridden in his framing of the 'immigrant' position, which serves tentatively as the point farthest removed from the national space into which a writer is born and the point where *narrative identity* transcends *national identity*.

Oliver Krämer has put forth a tentative sociology of Chinese writers in exile (1999; 2002), and investigated the different 'states of exile' experienced by Chinese writers abroad after June Fourth. He points to *alienation* as a common denominator for these writers, but also to different forms of *identification* with either 'the status of exile,' 'the host country,' or 'the country of origin' (1999: 166). However, the individual positioning in international literary space and the configuration of the symbolic attachment to a nationally founded literary identity is not entirely up to the writers themselves. As the cases of Ha Jin and Gao Xingjian illustrates, the subjective levels of alienation and identification are dialogically rehearsed in the fictional narrative, as well as in

[13] The etymological dictionary *Ci Yuan* 辭源 [Origin of words] traces the term '*liuwang*' back to the *Shi Jing* 詩經 [The book of songs] and the *Chu Ci*, and lists two possible definitions: the implication of 'banishment,' which is also explained by the concept '*liulang*' 流浪 ('wandering about,' or leading a vagrant existence without any fixed resiedence), but also the sense of 'to float' or be submerged in water' (隨水流逝). The *Chici* is the *locus classicus* in this regard, and carries the implication of dying.

theoretical expositions outside the literary work; at the same time, however, the writers are *placed* in relative positions of identification by a variety of exterior narratives (as the very one conducted presently), sometimes contradicting the writers' expressed intentions and often with a tendency (intentional or otherwise) to homogenise national identity into stereotypes based on of an implied asynchronous temporality between 'Chinese literature' and 'world literature.'

In *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, mentioned in the Introduction, John Cayley relates a scheduled meeting at a literary festival in Britain between Bei Dao and Maxine Hong Kingston (b. 1940) in 1995, and laments on this occasion that 'the audience of a literary festival is supposed to focus on *literary* values. How is this possible? At the present time, it simply doesn't happen. Chinese writing is still sold to its Western readers first as "Chinese" and then as "writing"' (Pan 1998: 135). What Cayley implies is that, despite their significant differences as writers, the two were grouped together on the basis of their objective identity as 'Chinese' rather than on the basis of an intrinsic relationship between their works. Unlike Bei Dao, Kingston was born in the United States and writes in English; and although this obviously should not cancel out the relevance of a discussion between the two—since both address issues of identity and belonging in their works—Cayley's charge is that they were not paired for *strictly* literary reasons. To a Chinese reader, it is implied, Kingston would never be mistaken for a Chinese writer; it is the 'Western reader' who is fed the homogenising narrative of 'Chineseness,' and presumably participates in the circulation and expansion of this essentialising discourse. Although Cayley in this way also suggests that the opinions of 'Western readers' be given special prominence on the question of 'literary values,' and despite the fact that he dismisses the pairing up between Bei Dao and Maxine Hong Kingston *precisely* on the basis of their ethnicity (rather than literary criteria), he is right that ethnic affiliation, or other 'objective' or discursively constructed criteria, often inform the identity of a writer as well as the engagement with his or her works in a, for whatever reason, dissimilar socio-cultural setting. As discussed particularly in Chapter One of this study, this fact of heteronomous assertion of 'literary value' seems to be specifically amplified in cases of writers from literary spaces on the periphery of the World Republic of Letters. Viewed through Casanova's characterisation of a literary work—by 'the place occupied by [the writer's] native literary space within world literature and his own position within this space' (Casanova 2004: 41)—the 'match' (if this was indeed intended as such) also seems odd, but not necessarily unwarranted. While situated according to this logic in different literary spaces, they might be seen as sharing a similar 'engagement' with their respective spaces by being marked by a minoritising discourse and a

certain amount of 'outsider vision.' The very conflict of 'identification' with any given 'native' literary space might in fact be what the two writers have in common; an exteriority to majority discourse and engagement in acts of displacement of the narratives of cultural and literary belonging.

In 'Kafuka de Bulage 卡夫卡的布拉格 [Kafka's Prague], Bei Dao reminisces about a different episode, also in 1995, this time at the Prague Writers' Festival:

> 今天整個的活動就叫「布拉格」，都是捷克作家，除了我，晚上我和捷克小說家斯克沃瑞基同台朗涌。我怎麼被歸入捷克作家的行列。這是邁克的主義。他告訴我，他原計劃是安排我和哈維爾一起朗涌。為此他前往總統府，而哈維爾的顧問借口不懂英文把他打發走了。
> Today's entire activity is called 'Prague' and all the writers are Czech—except for me. In the evening, Josef Skvorecky and I will share the stage for a reading. How did I get placed in the ranks of the Czech writers? It was Michael's idea. He said he had originally planned to have me read with Vaclav Havel, and to do this he went right over to the presidential residence; but Havel's advisor sent him away with the excuse that he did not understand English. (Bei 2009: 72; tr. Matthew Fryslie, Bei 2007: 88)

In this case the juxtaposition is reasoned on different criteria. Both Skvorecky (1924-2012) and Havel (1936-2011) were well-known Czech dissident writers, but particularly the latter was a central figure in the political opposition to the totalitarian dictatorship in the country and instrumental in its eventual downfall in 1989. Placing Bei Dao alongside Havel is obviously of extraordinary symbolic significance, but also here autonomous literary criteria are not the first that spring to mind. Initially it seems to dramatically exaggerate Bei Dao's involvement in China's political opposition, or at least to insist on reading him within the frame of active political opposition. There are no ethnic referents at work this time, but like in the above, they might be seen as having at one time shared a similar exteriority and contradiction to a constituted national literary space. In turn, in the context of World Literary Time, the Czech and Chinese literary spaces might also be compared on the basis of their relative distance to the 'Greenwich meridian:' neither of the two literatures are situated at the centre of world literary space and neither at the absolute periphery, and both are defined in terms of a temporal 'lack' due to political circumstances.

At the same time, the unequal temporal measures that guide world literary space might in turn be reflected in individual works. For instance, the second[14] stanza in Bei Dao's poem 'Zoulang' 走廊 [Corridor] from the bilingual collection *Forms of Distance* (1993), reads:

[14] In an earlier version of this poem this is the third stanza (see: Bei 1991: 44).

全世界自由的代理人
把我輸入巨型電腦：
一個潛入字典的外來語
一名持不同政見者
或一種與世界距離
the world's agents of freedom
entered me into their giant computer:
an alien voice sneaking into the dictionary
a dissident
perhaps a form of distance from the world
(Bei 1993a: 18-19, tr. David Hinton)

Although the third line should probably read 'foreign language' or literally 'a language that comes from the outside' (外來語) rather than 'an alien voice,' both the Chinese and English rendition of the piece seem to convey the basic issue at stake in the positioning in global literary space and the measuring of *distance* to a nation-based literary or cultural identity. It also conveys the dilemma faced by an international Chinese writer in the late twentieth century: the 'freedom' enjoyed on the international stage might easily turn into a new form of stratification. The 'computer' is a deadpan metaphor, but it provides a cynical paraphrase over the international system of unequal competition and struggle for positions described by Casanova and others. The 'agents of freedom' might easily be the distributers of symbolic capital and keepers of World Literary Time—translators, critics, academics, the Nobel committee—and although they provide both 'freedom' and distance, they exercise also a new form of stratification by entering 'me' into their databases, undoubtedly for purposes of surveillance and manipulation. The translation of the fourth line into 'a dissident,' which is the standard translation of '*chi butong zhengjian zhe*' (持不同政見者), overlooks the fact that the classifying '*yiming*' (一名), rather that '*yiwei*' (一位) or '*yige*' (一個), carries an etymological resonance of naming (or being named), which in turn points to a form of 'objective identity,' or a set of semiotic markers conferred by others in order to situate the individual writer along an intelligible scale of identification. It is this formal 'identity' of 'a dissident,' combined with the 'sneaking into the dictionary' of a 'language from outside' (外來語), that 'perhaps' constitutes 'a form of distance from the world.' The very first sentence in the introduction to *Forms of Distance*, for instance, observes that 'Bei Dao is by now well-known as the most prominent literary voice in China's political opposition' (Hinton 1993: vii); it is both liberating and limiting to be 'entered into the giant computer.'

One might, then, talk about two 'forms of distance' in the reading of contemporary Chinese literature within the logic of international literary space: the 'intrinsic' (or perceived) distance from

the 'national forms,' or the process of transformation variously delineated by Gao Xingjian and Ha Jin as directed away from the nation and towards a transnational or contrapuntal narrative imagination; as well as an 'extrinsic' form of distance, which sometimes reverses the intrinsic process by correlating the writer's identity according to the 'giant computer' and ascribing readymade labels like 'dissident' onto the 'language from outside.' These two *forms of distance*, or processes of intrinsic and extrinsic *translation*, constantly reinvent the dialectics of the system and the counter-system, but also manipulates these boundaries to at any given time include or exclude specific positions. Inevitably, this may give rise to a certain amount of friction between these translational levels, and opens a new space of meaning in the intersections between these 'inner' and 'outer' distances. These issues will be turned to in the last chapter.

Chapter Nine
Between Systems and Spaces: Transmutations of *Red Dust*

Insofar as the tension between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* conceptions of distance might be most clearly visualised when they seem to be poised in opposite directions—as in the case of Gao Xingjian, who, as mentioned in previous chapters, is clearly annoyed when taken to task with his Chinese literary identity by the international media—the workings of the international literary system is obviously more complicated than that, and requires the incorporation not only of a sometimes much more ambiguous relationship to Chinese literary space (the 'intrinsic' level of translation), but also an attention to the different local interpretations of the international writer (the 'extrinsic' level).[1] Although Gao might maintain a sense of continuous distancing from China (in terms of both physical movement, narrative distancing from the 'national forms,' as well as progressive exteriority to the literary field), the negotiation of his position as a transnational writer in world literary space is constantly informed by a variety of consecrating positions (editors, critics, translators, etc.) that might contradict or reinforce the writer's own sense of distance. Whether or not this is the case, these consecrating positions are invariably implicated in the symbolic reinvention in the systemic opposition within Chinese literary space as well as the positioning of this space within world literature.

[1] Various sections of this chapter were presented as an individual paper at the 2012 Association for Asian Studies in Toronto under the title: 'From China to the World: Issues of Travel and Translation in Ma Jian's *Red Dust*.'

Writing across systems

As mentioned in Part Two, Ma Jian wrote in and about Tibet in the 1980s, although his stay was significantly shorter than Ma Yuan's. Besides 'Liangchu nide Shetai huo Kongkongdangdang,' Ma Jian's three-month stay on the Plateau in 1985 inspired several pieces of travel writing, notably 'Wo Kandao de Xizang' 我看到的西藏 [Tibet as I saw it] (1987), *Ma Jian zhi Lu* 馬建之路 [Ma Jian's road] (1987), and most importantly *Hong Chen*, the English translation of which, *Red Dust*, won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award in 2002 and has achieved a substantial amount of international success. 'Wo Kandao de Xizang' actually relates Ma Jian's encounter with Ma Yuan in Lhasa, where he is invited to play basketball (Ma J. 1996: 116)—an activity that also features prominently in Ma Yuan's work 'Xugou,' discussed in Chapter Five. In *Hong Chen*, Ma Yuan has been given the alias Mo Yuan but the incident remains largely identical to the one described in the former work. In fact quite a number of passages in *Red Dust* are rewritings of previously published material, virtually all of which is based on Ma Jian's three years of backpacking across vast stretches of the Chinese hinterland between 1983 and 1986. The writer has drawn on resources from these travels in fiction, photography, as well as shorter and longer forms of travel writing (from newspaper columns to the book-length form), which have been published either on the mainland or in Hong Kong. Despite its obvious hostility towards the CCP, *Hong Chen* was actually published on the mainland despite a ban on Ma Jian's works since the episode with 'Liangchu nide Shetai' mentioned in Part Two. A significant passage from this later work is also reproduced in *Hong Chen*.

In the preface to the Hong Kong version and postscript to the mainland edition the writer explains the significance of the distance between the events described in the book (early 1980s) and the actual writing of the book (draft completed, London 1999). The two passages are almost identical:

> 這本書寫的是八十年代，我在中國近三年的非法流浪的經歷。
>
> 開始動筆寫這本書時，我已經在德國的大學教書。時代變了，生活環境變了，連記憶也在變。
>
> This book is about the 1980s and my experiences roaming about illegally in China for almost three years.
>
> When I started writing this book I was already teaching at a German university. Times have changed, environments have changed; even my memory is changing. (Ma J. 2002a: I; 2002b: 331)

But in fact the narrative has been constructed on the basis of various shorter pieces, some of which were published at least as early as 1987—and thus not too far away from the 'times' and

'environments' described in the book. These pieces can roughly be divided into three different 'layers,' composed and published at different times and in different socio-political contexts.

The *third layer*, the 'final' and most recent of these layers, might be said to refer to what Ma Jian describes in the preface/postscript: the one he started when he 'was already teaching at a German university' in the late 1990s and completed in London in 1999. It is here the 'book' is written: the earlier fragments (first and second layers) are arranged into a coherent travel narrative that takes the reader into 'unknown' China, guided by a disenfranchised young artist. The main narrative can in fact roughly be said to proceed in the opposite direction of its historical configuration, with the most recent chapters at the beginning of the book and the earliest towards the end. The first chapter (second in HK ed.) describes life in Beijing, and constructs this metropolitan space as the social and geographical site of the *departure* that frames the *passage* of the ensuing journey. Echoing the above, this point of 'departure' might be seen as an amplified version of the Beatnik trope:[2] oppressive social structures and moral codes—freedom is 'on the road' by one self, travelling for the sake of 'being in motion,' etc.

Beijing in the early 1980s is presented as the 'centre' of autocratic dictatorship—still lingering in the totalitarian conventions of the Maoist regime despite (or perhaps because of) Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms. Random political campaigns—notably that against 'Spiritual Pollution' from 1983 to 1984, which, as noted earlier, targeted among others Gao Xingjian, Yang Lian, and, as it turns out, the narrator himself—purge, execute and incarcerate scores of artists, writers, and intellectuals who openly oppose the Party line; and the bureaucracy is persistently monitoring and censoring the personal lives of these 'dissidents.' It is not the CCP alone who is to blame, we are told, since political power, in the final analysis, is legitimised by the silent consent of the masses—caught up, as it would seem, in the strife for individual gain and indifference to social and political injustice. It is here the narrative subject is constructed: an alienated artist surrounded by an oppressive political system and a society gone astray.

The *second layer* in the narrative encompasses the majority of the travel episodes in the 'border-regions of China. The narrator travels far from the overpopulated metropolis: from the

[2] In addition to several references to Beat Literature in the blurb to *Red Dust* (paperback ed.), Ma Jian draws this parallel himself in an interview printed at the back of the HK edition. Upon being asked by the reporter whether he sees any similarities between his own writing and that of the great classical Chinese travel writer Xu Xiake, he answers that he sees more intimate kinship with Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957)—it is a travel 'away from something' more than a 'travel to' anywhere in specific. In addition to this, there is made concrete reference to Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) in the work: '"Ginsberg can sing out of his window in despair, he can cry all over the street. That sounds like heaven to me. He implies his country is not fit for humans to live in. Well, he should live China for a month, then see what he thinks. Everyone here dreams of the day we can sing out of our windows in despair"' (Ma J. 2001: 171).

deserts of Gansu and Qinghai to the lush rainforests of southern Yunnan and, finally, onto the Tibetan Plateau—which constitutes a sort of 'goal' to the physical and spiritual journey: the place where one 'sees clearer' due to the (ideological) 'thin air.' We know from the preceding chapters that he is on the run from oppression, content to 'roam about' (流浪) with limited means and comfort as long as he is outside the panoptic vision of the state; but he is also an explorer of the cultural and territorial peripheries of the PRC.

The majority of these 'exploratory' accounts are in fact rewritings of shorter pieces of travel writing published since the mid-1980s in magazines and journals mainly in Hong Kong and collected under the heading 'Liulang Zhongguo' 流浪中國 [roaming about China] in a 1996 publication of essays and poetry entitled *Rensheng Banlü* 人生伴侶 [life's companion]. In the former renditions of these pieces Ma can be said to have been 'negotiating' his position between Hong Kong and China; by this point he had become a 'dissident writer' seeking political asylum in Hong Kong and thus able to, in a manner of speaking, 'tell the tale' from the inside. This does not appear to be the main asset of these shorter pieces, however; while still highly personal, the pieces from 'Liulang Zhongguo' are generally less concerned with condemning autocracy than with portraying the diverse ethnic minority groups in Western China. Also in Hong Kong, Ma published the photo book *Ma Jian zhi Lu* 馬建之路 [Ma Jian's road], which in fact already provides the basic structure that later was to become *Red Dust*: many of the same episodes are recounted here, as is the progression of the journey; and several of the photographs have in turn been included in *Hong Chen* and *Langji Zhongguo*. The narrator is conscious of the cultural hegemony associated with his person as a Han Chinese; he is sensitive to the reluctance among Tibetans, for instance, to submit to Beijing's vision of modernity and 'civilisation,' but he is also largely complicit in the imperial system by travelling through its channels and outposts on the cultural and political 'frontier' (his sojourns in the border regions are typically facilitated by means of a feigned 'introduction letter' that he passes to the local Han bureaucrats). Here the above positioning of the narrator falls apart: from the 'telling the tale from the inside,' he now functions in a double role—largely as 'insider' exploring an 'outside,' he is constructing China's peripheries through a 'privileged vision' synonymous with the discursive centre he is allegedly running away from.

The *first layer* in *Hong Chen* constitutes roughly one third of the final chapter—the one wherein the narrator at last reaches Tibet. Undergoing heavy editing in the PRC version, this part describes the gory details of the Tibetan sky burial as well as (what appears to be prevalent) instances of polygamy and child marriage among rural Tibetan communities. The majority of this

material, as mentioned in Part Two, was published in the PRC in *Renmin Wenxue* in 1987, as the first chapter of 'Liangchu nide Shetai huo Kongkongdangdang.' By this point Ma had already relocated to Hong Kong and was thus not liable for prosecution, but what mainly annoyed the writer about the political denunciation was not, as one might have suspected, the inhibition on the freedom of expression exercised by the state, but rather the fact that he was portrayed as a 'liar' in the mainland media. In the interview printed in the back of *Hong Chen*, Ma Jian explains that this accusation was the direct incentive behind the publication of *Ma Jian zhi Lu* in Hong Kong later that same year, in which he provided 'evidence' in the form of a series of photographs that included the naked corpse of a pregnant woman and several depicting the dismemberment of human bodies in connection with a sky burial (in which Ma Jian apparently participates). Accompanying the photograph of the pregnant corpse is the text: 'there is a child in this young woman's belly, so her shape has changed completely. One can imagine from the rope sticking out of her vagina the pain she experienced before she died' (Ma J. 1987c: 62). And on the following page, depicting an almost fully dismembered corpse: 'after her face was peeled of I forgot what she used to look like' (ibid: 63). These images obviously refer back to the scene in 'Liangchu nide Shetai' discussed in Chapter Six, although without any of the contextualisation. As mentioned already, the fact that 'Liangchu nide Shetai' was published as *fiction* did not dissuade either Ma Jian or the GAPP from situating the discussion in terms of the work's 'accuracy.' When the scene reappeared in *Hong Chen* some fifteen years later, it was again inserted in its former fictionalised context, only this time published as a travel novel—thus retaining some of the truth-claim apparent in *Ma Jian zhi Lu*. Below, however, it will be agued that even this is not a stable category when the work enters the transnational temporality of world literary space.

Intrinsic and extrinsic appropriation

In the course of *Hong Chen* the narrator experiences a transformation from the role of the 'observed' to that of the 'observer:' from the silenced object of totalitarian vision to the narrating subject of self and others. The latter disposition is exercised in full when the narrator physically escapes the metropolitan space and journeys into western China in the final chapters of the book. Geographically and culturally distant from the political centre, these regions serve as sites for 'testing' the boundaries of 'China' and centralised power. Although Tibet, as has been shown, probably poses as the most politically efficient symbol of 'internal otherness' in China (since its

formal annexation in 1950), the south-western province of Yunnan provides a scaled-down but even more diverse register of China's 'internal others.' Presently bordering Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, Yunnan has been at the absolute margins of the Chinese empires for centuries (since 1382), and has spawned a long tradition of travel writing about the area, from Xu Xiake to Ai Wu. In these parts of the work the narrative mobilises all the conventional features of the travel-writing genre: the dramatisation of progress, the hardships endured along the journey, vivid descriptions of natural scenery and landscape, but above all, dense ethnographic descriptions. While these observations, as explained above, were initially recorded in short articles in Hong Kong magazines in the late 1980s (grouped above as the '*second layer*'), their reappearance in this new context is not necessarily to the same effect. While things and memories might change over fifteen years, the most significant difference clearly lies in contextualisation, or what might be understood as diverse strategies for *framing* specific events and mobilising the signifying value of the cultural encounter.

An example of this might be made of a visit to the Jinuo nationality (基諾族) in the Xishuangbanna (西双版纳) region of southern Yunnan, and the encounter with the little girl Meina. This account was formerly published in *Mingbao* 明報 [*Ming Pao*] in Hong Kong in March 1987 under the title 'Meiyou Ting Ta Jiangguo Hua de Xiao Meina' 沒有聽她講過話的小美娜 [The little Meina I never heard talk], and republished as part of 'Liulang Zhongguo' in 1996. The anecdote is also included almost verbatim in *Ma Jian zhi Lu*. In the two former cases the anecdote is preceded by a brief account of the particularity of Jinuo otherness (an account that is placed a couple of pages later in *Ma Jian zhi Lu*). In its early rendering, the passage appears as follows:

> 基諾族的一大特點是直系親屬可以相愛為情人，但不能結婚，結婚要重選丈夫，但允許互送禮品懸掛各自家裡，死後再團聚，在陰間成親。還允許男或女方在情人結婚時，出其不意把一竹筒污水潑在情人身上，以洩嫉火。
> The one major distinctiveness of the Jinuo nationality is that directly related family members can fall in love and form couples. They are not allowed to marry, however. As for marriage [she] must choose a new husband, but they are allowed to give each other presents to hang in their individual homes. After they die they can reunite and become lovers in the netherworld. It is also allowed for the male or female side to vent their disapproval at their lover's wedding by pouring a bamboo jug of dirty water over their lover in order to quench the fires of jealousy. (Ma J. 1996: 93)

In comparison, the Hong Kong and mainland versions of *Hong Chen*, as well as the English translation (below), appear to relate the same information:

> 李書記說，同姓的男女可以戀愛同居，但禁忌結婚。當其中一個要結婚時，可互贈誓死成雙的信物，女送男腰帶，男送女煙包，懸掛在婚房裡。死後携帶信物在九條叉路約會，一起再去陰間結婚。已經見了幾個掛著生死信物的家庭。這也就是說：情感記憶會真實地呈現在生活之中，雙方僅僅是期待未來的臨時路友了。為了表示愛情的忠誠，在婚禮上男人必須準備一盆刷鍋水，潑在情人身上，以洩嫉恨。沒有人潑濁水的新娘會很丟臉。
> Secretary Li says that males and females of the same surname [*tongxing*] can fall in love and live together, but it is taboo to marry. At the time one of them wants to get married, they will exchange tokens of undying devotion to each other: the girl gives the boy a belt and the boy gives the girl a small pouch [*yanbao*] to hang at their marital homes. After they die, they will carry this token to their rendezvous at the Nine Crossroads, and they will go together to the netherworld and get married. I have already seen several households where this token of life and death was hanging. This suggests, that the emotional memory is manifested in their daily lives, and they are simply waiting for their future temporary companion. In order to express the sincerity of their love, the boy must prepare a bowl of dishwashing water for the wedding and pour it over their lover to give vent to envy and hatred. A bride that no one pours dirty water on loses face. (Ma J. 2002a: 364; 2002b: 270)

> Jinuo custom allows members of the same clan to fall in love, but not to marry. When the time comes for a clan couple to separate, they exchange gifts with each other as pledges of undying love. The girl gives a leather belt and the boy gives a felt bag. These gifts are then taken to their new marital homes and displayed on the wall. When the clan lovers die, they carry their gifts to the mythical Nine Crossroads, meet up and travel together to the underworld where they can marry each other at last. For the Jinuo, husbands and wives in this world are mere companions of the road, true love must wait for the afterlife. I have seen those belts and bags hanging on the walls of several village huts. When a girl gets married, her clan lover splashes her with water from a dirty washing-up bowl as a show of jealousy. It is considered a great humiliation for a bride not to be drenched at her wedding. (Ma J. 2001: 264).

This 'major distinctiveness of the Jinuo nationality' is presented as part of a journal entry in the three versions of *Hong Chen*, and thus to some extent temporally disjointed from the main narrative. In the mainland and Hong Kong versions a certain 'secretary Li' provides the information, whereas in *Red Dust* and the former piece, reproduced in 'Liulang Zhongguo,' it is the narrator himself. It is interesting to note that 'directly related family members' (直系親屬) in the 1987 text has been substituted with 'males and females of the same surname' (同姓的男女) or 'members of the same clan' in the later versions. There is a significant difference between being 'directly related family' and 'clan.' While the latter might suggest relationships not strictly based on bloodline but also mythological ancestry or tribal bonds, the former immediately begs the question: 'how closely related?' The term could easily be taken to suggest an acceptance among the Jinuo of amorous or sexual relationships between siblings or even parents and children. To an outsider with no more specific knowledge than the given text, the term strongly suggests a cultural consent to incest—but more than that: the practice is actually institutionalised to the point where myths are constructed and formal tokens exchanged. The 'same surname' (同姓), as the passage strictly reads in *Hong Chen* and *Langji Zhongguo*, is not as dramatic but nonetheless carries a similar potential; it is furthermore

assisted by the addition of the last sentence: that it is a 'great humiliation' to not have experienced this form of institutionalised incest for a young Jinuo woman. *Red Dust*, on the other hand, employs the word 'clan,' which severely diminishes the power of these allusions: people of the same clan might indeed be directly related family members, but they need not be; and since it is not specifically addressed in the text, they most likely are not (or so one might assume). That clan members should be dating comes as no great surprise; rather, it strikes the reader of the English text as remarkable that the Jinuo necessarily must choose their spouse from outside the community. While '*tongxing*' (同姓) is not uncommonly translated as 'clan' or something of the kind in order to avoid the hackneyed 'same surname,' it appears in the present context as a deliberate act of 'smoothing out' this controversial ambiguity.

As in aspects of the colonial narrative of Tibetan culture discussed in Chapter Six, Jinuo otherness is located primarily in issues of *sexual morality*, which inevitably casts the directly following encounter between the narrator and the little girl Meina in a pseudo-erotic framework (the passage is reproduced almost verbatim in *Ma Jian zhi Lu*). The 1987 text reads as follows:

> [……] 這時我才發現美娜的一隻腳包著好多布，腫得可怕。我忙放下相機，問她怎麼了。她也不吭聲，但不反對我去碰她的腳。我把那些髒布拆掉，發現傷口爛成黑紫色，有兩個破口往外浸著膿血，原來四個月前她被鐵鈀紮在腳上，一頭進去又穿透腳背紮出來，上面雖然塗了些土製的紅色粉末，但根本沒有消毒。我把隨身帶的紗布、雲南白藥、止痛片和維生素全給了她，給她重新塗上藥包好才離去。
>
> […] Only at this point did I discover that one of Meina's feet were wrapped in a considerable amount of cloth and had swelled up horribly. I hurriedly put down the camera and asked her what was wrong. She didn't utter a sound, but did not object when I started touching her foot. When I removed the grimy wrappers I discovered that the wound had decayed into a dark-purple colour, and from the two openings were oozing pus and blood. Apparently she had pierced her foot on a steel rake four months earlier, one spike had gone through and penetrated the back of the foot. Even though some crude red powder had been smeared on the top, it hadn't gotten rid of the infection at all. I gave her all the gauze, Yunnan Baiyao,[3] painkillers, and vitamins I had on me, and didn't leave until I had applied new medicine and wrapped it neat and tight. (Ma J. 1996: 94)

The following day the narrator tracks down a health clinic in the district town and convinces the head doctor to send a nurse into the mountains to attend little Meina. At first the doctor declines, explaining that there is a shortage of staff, but after the narrator learns that he is a graduate from a medical college and of Jinuo ethnicity his case somehow goes through. Meina is sitting alone outside when the narrator returns with the nurse in a rented car. She immediately rises, and limps into the house to bring bananas and water for the guests. The nurse treats the child, and again she

[3] A form of medicinal herbal powder developed in Yunnan.

does not utter the slightest sound of distress. Before he leaves, the narrator writes down a postal address in Chengdu, and explains to Meina that he has taken care of all the expenses and that she should not worry about a thing. In the event that the clinic should forward claims for additional fees, she should not hesitate to contact him, and he will personally 'look up the leaders of your Jinuo district and criticise them' (ibid: 94). There follows a short vignette about a brief mail correspondence ensuing between Meina and the narrator long after he has left Xishunagbanna. He is informed that she currently likes to dance, is a good student, and so forth. There is a small photograph of Ma Jian and what is presumably Meina at the end of the text.

The three versions of *Hong Chen* largely correspond on this passage, and do not radically divert from the early rendition. No longer part of the journal entry, the episode is related in the narrative present. The picture from 'Liulang Zhongguo' is reproduced in *Langji Zhongguo*:

> 我記起碰見一個叫美娜的小姑娘坐在門口，腳被鐵鉤扎透了，爛成黑紫色，破口留著膿和血，腫得走不了路。就把隨身帶的藥和紗布拿出來給她重新包紮了。她沒一絲疼或者疼的表情。站起一隻腳跳著進屋拿了個香蕉給我。
> I remember seeing the little girl Meina crouched in a doorway of that Jinuo village. She had stepped on a rusty nail the week before and her foot was swollen with pus and blood. She could hardly walk. I washed the wound, smeared it with antiseptic cream and covered it with a clean bandage, and she didn't flinch once. When I finished, she hobbled inside and fetched me[4] a banana. (Ma J. 2002a: 364; 2002b: 270; tr. Flora Drew, Ma J. 2001: 265)

After this episode, however, rather than embarking on the mission to rescue the little girl as in the above, the narrator visits an old sorcerer who has formally spent eighteen years in prison due to an unfortunate act of divination. It is clear from the dialogue that the old man is trapped in the split identity of the sorcerer: a position of high significance in traditional Jinuo society, but also one vastly incongruous with socialist modernity—a fact that two decades in a communist prison has no-doubt made him realise. The narrator is curious about traditional Jinuo ritual practice as well as the sorcerer's role in treating medical cases, and it is not until this point that the narrative eventually returns to Meina:

> 聽說村裡的人病了也都找你問卜求鬼？
> 是嘛，一般小病吃舅舅嚼的飯就能治好。厲害了才拿來病人的上衣，包上米和鹽，還有雞蛋和薑。找我念咒祈鬼。要是大病還要殺豬送鬼，我一個人做就不行。
> 白天在山上轉著拍照時，還發現路上擺著一對用芭蕉葉子做的送鬼船。船上寫著咒語，船頭點著香。

[4] The final first-person pronoun (我) in the passage from *Hong Chen* is rendered as the second-person pronoun (你) in *Langji Zhongguo*.

> 病了還是要吃藥，人命關天，送什麼病鬼也沒用。那個叫美娜的孩子腳都腫爛了，再不治就保不住了。他[*sic*]家裡到底給她塗了些什麼？根本不管用。是不是她舅舅嚼的飯？
> 'The villagers say they come here when they are sick and you drive the demons from their bodies.'
> 'Most illnesses can be cured by eating some food from one's uncle's mouth. If the sickness is serious, relatives bring me rice, salt, eggs and ginger, and I recite from the scriptures. For very severe cases I kill a pig, but I need some help with that.'
> While taking photographs that morning, I had seen two small boats made of plantain leaves set on a mountain path. The Jinuo believe these 'spirit boats' carry diseases away from their village. There were spells written along the sides and incense sticks burning on the prows.
> 'Sometimes it is necessary to take medicine though,' I said. 'Little Meina's foot is gangrenous. She will lose it if it isn't treated. Whatever her family smeared on the wound didn't seem to be working. I hope it wasn't food from her uncle's mouth.' (Ma J. 2002a: 366-367; 2002b: 272-273; 2001: 266-267)

From the account of the narrator's heroic mission to save the little Jinuo girl in the 1987 text—treating her himself and bringing a nurse to attend her against the clinic's initial inclination—the anecdote is turned into something quite different in the later texts. There is no question that the narrator enacts a 'civilising presence' in both situations, but with significantly different rhetorical agendas. From what appears as a mere act of altruism and a moderate critique of the inadequacies of the health-care system in peripheral areas, the episode is turned into a pointed attack on 'backward culture' and superstition. The narrator carries this impulse in the 1987 text as well—he changes the bandage, applies 'proper' medicine, and mobilises the assistance of scientifically trained personnel to right the damage inflicted by local folklore—but it is not turned into the main purpose of the episode. However, when this episode is juxtaposed with, and in fact serves merely as a prelude to, the primary event in the subchapter, it is transformed into a sarcastic showcase of Jinuo backwardness (and minority custom in general) rather than the imperial system that stratifies these people in particularly vulnerable positions. In this sense, the narrative 'vision' is also situated at different distances from its object, which might be related to moves of 'intrinsic appropriation' by the writer, but can also be seen as the inscription of locally constituted *extrinsic* narratives: like the writer, the narrative can also be seen as travelling between systems and spaces.

Framing of the transnational narrative

While the above might be taken as an example of the process of intrinsic translation between narrative 'levels,' the process of extrinsic translation might be visualised by comparing the edition of *Hong Chen* published in Hong Kong with the English translation, *Red Dust*, and the rare mainland version *Langji Zhongguo* 浪迹中国 [wandering China] (2002). The final draft to the work

was allegedly completed in London in 1999 (in Chinese), but first published in English in the UK in 2001 as *Red Dust*, with the subtitle *A Path through China*. It won the now defunct Thomas Cook Travel Book Award in 2002, whereupon the Chinese text was published, first on the Chinese mainland and shortly afterwards in Hong Kong. While no dates appear in the English text, the two Chinese editions are concluded with: 'Draft completed in London, November 1999' (Ma J. 2002a: 443; 2002b: 330). The postscript in *Langji Zhongguo* is dated 'October 10th 2000' and the preface to *Hong Chen* 'September 19th 2002,' both in London. There are significant structural similarities between these two accompanying texts, suggesting that they have been prepared on the basis of a similar draft. While the publication of *Langji Zhongguo* predates *Hong Chen* by approximately two months, the postscript was supposedly written more than two years earlier—predating also the publication of *Red Dust*.[5]

Except from the fact that there is no preface or postscript in the English edition, it is, like the two others, carefully framed by the paratext. Characteristic for all three versions is the construction of a writer and narrator that is equipped with a 'unique' *vision*—and thus supposedly better suited to engage the subject at hand: a (retrospective) travel narrative of China in the 1980s. On the back of the first edition of *Red Dust* it is stated that 'Ma Jian's […] personal story offers a *unique insight*—by a man who was *both insider and outsider in his own country*—into Chinese society since the death of Mao, and gives a *real*, unforgettable sense of what it is like to live in China now' (my italics). Ma Jian left China for Hong Kong in 1986, and moved to Europe when administration was handed over to the PRC in 1997. This is duly pointed out in the short author biography, and the writer is accordingly attributed a form of transnational or 'cosmopolitan' vision—i.e. the book could neither have been written by a Chinese in the PRC nor by an 'outside' traveller but only one who, in a manner of speaking, 'spans' both domains.

On the Anchor paperback edition from 2002 there is furthermore included an extensive selection of critical praise (some of which is reproduced on the two Chinese editions). Among these quotes, more than one reference is made to the American Beat Generation, and particularly Jack Kerouac. On the front cover it reads: 'Honest, raw and insightful … the Chinese equivalent of *On the Road*' (*Time*). It is thus made clear to the imagined Anglophone reader that this is a 'non-conformist' travel narrative—a tale of escape as much as one of discovery. In various interviews,

[5] It should also be pointed out, however, that at the end of *Langji Zhongguo* it is stated that: 'it must be noted that the editor has made revisions at various places in this book' 本书个别地方编者做了修改，特此说明 (Ma J. 2002b: 332).

Ma Jian has corroborated this affiliation with Kerouac's classic (an affiliation that is also pointed out on the back of the French and Norwegian editions, for instance, but on neither of the Chinese).

On the cover of the Vintage paperback edition (also from 2002), however, a different quote appears (this time from *The Observer*): 'His trek through China to Tibet is a beautiful, disturbing read—a new *Wild Swans*' (*Observer*). The connection to *Wild Swans*—the enormously popular novel by Jung Chang (b. 1952) from 1991—completely dismantles the non-conformist framing of the Anchor edition and turns the imagined audience into one in favour of sentimental 'witness literature' or, as Stephen Owen provocatively called it in the essay mentioned in Chapter One, a 'cosy ethnicity' (1990: 29). The only apparent connection between *Red Dust* and *Wild Swans* is that they were both written by Chinese exiles, and although both framings are acts of domestication and trade in the business of 'national commoditisation,' they employ foreignness with radically different discursive strategies. Similar to the pairing of Bei Dao with Maxine Hong Kingston, the juxtaposition of an 'obscure' mainland writer with a popular 'hyphenated' English-language writer clearly serves purposes of domestication. The effects of 'push' and 'pull' can in this case be seen as the construction of a Chinese identity that is, however, not too foreign to be consumed by the imagined Anglophone reader; it is a matter of determining national 'distance' in the reading of texts in 'the wrong language.'

On the cover of *Langji Zhongguo*, 'United Kingdom' (英国) appears before the author's name, and in the author biography on the flip Ma Jian is described as an 'English avant-garde writer.' It is stressed already on the cover, however, that the text originally was written in Chinese and that foreign editions of the work are 'already available in the UK, the United States, Italy, Holland, Norway, and other countries.' He is an international writer with Chinese characteristics; not, as in *Red Dust*, a Chinese writer with international characteristics. He obviously cannot be made into a 'fully Chinese' writer, due to his clinch with the authorities back in the late 1980s—only *Lamianzhe* 拉麵者 [The noodle maker], under the pseudonym Ma Jiangang 馬建剛, has had a single printing on the mainland since he became a target for the campaign against 'bourgeois liberalism' in 1987, and it is something of a paradox that this edition ever came out. The praise on the back includes Jonathan Spence, and (ironically) Gao Xingjian (who was written out of PRC literary history already before he obtained French citizenship and won the Nobel), as well as a translation of a piece from *The Independent* that features on the back of both paperback editions of *Red Dust* mentioned

above.[6] He is not made into the fugitive from autocratic dictatorship like in the above, but is constructed as a somewhat different kind of 'insider and outsider' in China: being an 'English writer,' he is clearly also Chinese, and despite having composed the work in Chinese, several foreign translations are already available. While perhaps not quite as 'dangerous' as a Beat writer, he seems relatively dislocated from national spaces, floating somewhere in-between socio-linguistic traditions.

The framing of *Hong Chen* also relies on praise from English-language reviews on the back cover and a similar author biography as in *Red Dust*. Incidentally there features a quote from the same *Observer* review as on *Red Dust* above, but an ominous text on the front cover creates a disturbing image that goes the distance in establishing a transnational identity of the writer—distinct, however, from the other two: 'In 1997 Ma Jian came to Europe from Hong Kong. All dressed in black, and as always supporting an awe-inspiring demeanour. Concealed underneath his unwashed black cloak was a set of marvellous stories.' The image of the author is constructed quite differently in this case, which might be due to Ma Jian's long-term residency in the Hong Kong literary field. Since the late 1980s, he has published regularly in local newspapers and magazines, in addition to several books, and thus also, on account of Hong Kong's central position in the network of distribution of transnational Chinese literature (or books not necessarily approved by the GAPP but potentially interesting to wider readership, both Chinese and otherwise) capable of spreading to Taiwan and other communities overseas. He is not made 'other' as in the English and mainland editions—you sense a certain familiarity with the writer—but it is understood that these stories had to go to Europe before returning to Hong Kong. While being essentially a travel book about China, the work is predicated in all three instances on the writer having travelled 'beyond'—not only the *object* of narration (China in the 1980s), but also the narrating *subjectivity* that sustains that narration: the writer is dislocated from, but still defined in terms of, *the nation* and only afterwards equipped with a cross-cultural or 'cosmopolitan' perspective.

In addition to these issues of more or less explicit framing, there is also inconsistency as to the exact nature of the book itself. A photo insert appears at the beginning of *Hong Chen* but annotated

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[6] On *Red Dust* the quote from *The Independent* reads: '*Red Dust* is a tour de force, a powerfully picaresque cross between the sort of travel book any Western author would give his eye-teeth to write and a disturbing confession. […] It stands out among the many literary offerings of the Cultural Revolution's "lost generation."' By comparison, on *Langji Zhongguo* it reads: '*Langji Zhongguo* (translated as *Hong Chen* abroad) is a great work; it has a kind of forceful aesthetics [力量的美感], and is also a piece of work that makes western writers pull out both their eyes and their teeth [把牙齒和眼睛都拔了出來]. At the same time, its honesty is also difficult to verify [難以承認]; it is a stand-out masterpiece of the lost [i.e. 'confused:' 迷惘] in China in the 1980s.'

photographs are dispersed throughout the text of *Langji Zhongguo*. It is understood that the majority of these photos have been taken by the writer—or alternately feature the writer himself, usually in the company of 'locals.' The appearance of photos throughout the text of *Langji Zhongguo* brings the narrative into the discursive territory of an 'exploratory' work: a 'literature of discovery,' that (at least nominally) should be more concerned with recording of the 'objective' world, than with the 'subjective' world of the narrator—however dislocated or 'in-between' that might be—and certainly a travel 'to' rather than a travel 'from.'[7] The photos were lifted specifically from the photo book Ma Jian published in 1987 in Hong Kong to document his trip (and to counter accusations on the mainland that he was a liar, etc.) *Ma Jian zhi Lu*. Photos were also included with various shorter pieces of travel writing that the writer published in magazines and newspapers in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s—many of which were collected under the title 'Liulang Zhongguo' in the collection of essays and poetry *Rensheng Banlü*.

The English edition, on the other hand, features maps (one for each chapter), which are also reproduced in the Norwegian edition (Ma J. 2003)—which, despite the fact that it is not explicitly stated, is a direct translation from the English edition. Although the maps essentially also signal a 'travel to,' they point back to a literature of discovery much older and much less 'certain:' the maps appear to be hand-drawn, pointing to the exploration of 'blank spaces' on world atlases in previous centuries. The hand-drawn routes similarly do not convey a 1:1 representation of the 'objective' world as implied by the photos. Alternately, the French edition, *Chemins de Poussière Rouge* (Ma J. 2005), is categorised on the cover as a 'novel' (*roman*) and not, as the English edition, still listed under 'travel' despite its comparative 'literary' ambitions. The cover art portrays a bleak landscape with a solitary figure—quite similar (and probably not accidentally so, since they are published by the same publisher) to Gao Xingjian's novels *Lingshan* (or *La Montagne de l'Âme*) and *Yige Ren de Shengjing* (*Le Livre d'un Homme Seul*). In this context it is striking that the cover of *Langji Zhongguo* features *two* travellers, one giving his hand in assistance to the other (see Figure Four). Although they might arguably be various renditions of the 'same' narrative, the books in fact poses as entirely different texts: the capability of these editions to span the territory between introspective novel and guide book clearly illustrates that 'translation' does not only occur on the linguistic or

[7] In a similar move of discursive reframing, a 2010 edition of Gao Xingjian's *Lingshan*, published by Linking 聯經 in Taiwan to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Nobel Price, also came with the insertion of 'fifty valuable black and white photographs from back then' (Gao 2010: cover), and taken by Gao himself during the travels that loosely make up the structure of the novel. Gao, however, insists that *Lingshan* is a work of fiction, and that the choice to include photographs was solely the editor's (personal communication). It is clear, however, that the inclusion of the photos highlights the 'investigation' over 'fabrication.'

'intrinsic' level but frames the whole engagement with the work. Already in the paratext, we witness the construction of slightly different narratives about the writer and the text, and thus also the construction of significantly different narrative perspectives and agendas—all predicated to some extent on the 'insider/outsider' paradigm, but divergent as to where on this hypothetical transnational scale this subjective position is more specifically located, and as to what role the work intends to assume for itself in international literary space.

Narrative identity: the vision 'in-between'

The title of the first chapter in *Red Dust*, 'Red Walls,' contains only half of the information of the corresponding first chapter to *Langji Zhongguo* and second chapter in *Hong Chen*: 'Red Walls and Eyes' (紅牆和眼睛). While this is no doubt due to the fact that it reads better in English, the 'eyes' are no less important than the 'red walls' in the conceptual framework of the work(s)—but also in the distinction between them. Although the English rendition of the heading downplays the focus on the visual and the act of seeing, it follows a similar employment of 'seers' throughout the first chapter: authorities are watching, but also neighbours, colleagues, even family and friends. *Langji Zhongguo* retains the 'eyes' in the title, but in the text these are generally absent.

While 'walls' clearly evoke images of oppression and control, and the colour 'red' unmistakably is analogous to the political left, then 'red walls' might easily be read as communist tyranny, totalitarian rule, etc.[8] The 'eyes' should naturally be read in conjunction with this metaphor of political oppression—there are always someone watching. As such, the entire narrative arch can be read as a paraphrase over the combined physical and spiritual *distancing* from the Communist literary system in quest of the 'vision in exile.' As Ma Jian writes in the preface to the Hong Kong edition (italics are mine):

> 當時，紅色政權剛開放。追求自由在我的意識裡開始萌芽。因此常被警察傳訊拘留。 我處在殘忍的專制和群眾的監視之中。於是我辭了官方記者的職務，離開了到處是眼睛的北京，流浪去了。
>
> At that time, *red political power had recently been lifted*, and the *pursuit of freedom* had begun to sprout in my consciousness. Because of this I was often *detained and questioned by the police*. I lived under the *ruthless supervision by the autocracy and the masses*, and thus resigned from my job as

[8] 'Red dust' might in this context even be taken to suggest a pulverisation of the red walls realised by the 'escape' from the confines of the city and the acquisition of the fluid identity of the wanderer. However, the term is probably more likely chosen due to its more obvious signifying effect; presumably with origins in Buddhism, it is generally taken to designate 'human society' or the 'predicament of man' as opposed to for instance the after-life, spirits, gods, etc.

> government reporter, left behind the Beijing where there were *eyes everywhere*, and went roaming about. (Ma J. 2002a: I)

This is not quite conveyed in the PRC postscript:

> 其时，中国已迈开改革开放的步伐。追求自我的意识开始萌芽，为此我常遇到麻烦，周围不少人与我有些格格不入。于是我辞了官方记者的职务，离开了生活多年的北京，流浪去了。
> At that time, China was already *striding forward with the pace of the Reforms and Opening*, and the idea of *pursuing subjectivity* had begun to sprout. Because of this I often *encountered trouble*, and I was somewhat incompatible with my surroundings. Thus I resigned from my job as government reporter, left behind the Beijing where I had *lived for several years*, and went roaming about. (Ma J. 2002b: 331)

It is obvious, that while essentially conveying the same condition (the moment the writer decides to pack it and leave), it is under significantly different circumstances. In the HK preface, Ma Jian complains about the 'ruthless supervision by the autocracy and the masses' in Beijing: he is the *seen*, the object of other people's vision. When he leaves the capital and initiates his 'pursuit of freedom,' however, he is allowed to ascend the privileged position of the *seer*—the narrator of others (a position he is ready to fight for—e.g. photos). In the PRC postscript it is the alleged 'freedom' gained by Deng Xiaoping's Reforms that allows the narrator to realise both the journey and the 'vision.' There is a big difference between the 'pursuit of freedom,' indicating a negative presence, and 'pursuing subjectivity,' realised by the positive presence of the Party; it is thanks to the Reforms that he 'sees' and wants to 'pursue subjectivity.' The 'central vision' of the state is not something he is running away from—like in the other rendition—in order to 'be able to see;' thus the eyes that eventually take the reader into the 'clear air' on the Tibetan plateau and elsewhere are qualified in radically different ways, and similarly located in different positions towards the seen.

The 'Red Walls' chapter is listed as second in *Hong Chen* and preceded by a short chapter entitled 'Roaming about in China' (在中國流浪). Reading more like a preface than an actual chapter, it figures in neither of the other two versions. By mentioning China's successful bid for the Olympics (awarded on July 13, 2001), the chapter betrays itself as a later addition to the main body of the text (dated 1999). The narrator makes use of this later addition to substantiate his position of 'both insider and outsider' and provides an analysis of the accessibility to 'vision'—the ability and inability to *see*:

> 申奧成功的中國，將會吸引很多外國人去中國參觀旅行。他們會以欣賞異國情調為主，從參觀名勝古蹟，擴大到走進城市鄉村。愛面子的中國人早為老外專門準備了京劇、少林武功和古董家居，這些和中國人沒甚麼關係的中國夢。

> 探險和旅行是希望看到與自己不同的生活。但西方人很難走進普通中國人的生活裡，除了語言交流的障礙，中國人也保守。沒有朋友介紹，他們也不和生人交往。西方人在他們眼裡僅僅是只有錢和性的鬼佬。
>
> 中國人對西方人的生活毫無興趣。公元一四九二年鄭和七次下西洋，都沒有帶回改變中國的人文知識。而馬可波羅的旅行探險，確給意大利帶回了豐富的人文科學。但是，她如果今天再去中國旅行，將會只能失望地帶回從旅遊商店裡買的京劇臉譜和粗俗的旗袍。
>
> China's successful bid for the Olympics will encourage a lot of foreigners to visit China for travel. Guided by a keen interest in other countries, they will tour scenic spots and historical sites and eventually move into the cities and villages. The face-loving Chinese will already have prepared Beijing Opera, Shaolin martial arts, and antique furniture especially for these *laowai*—these artefacts of the China dream that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Chinese people.
>
> Travel and exploration is motivated by a desire to observe life that is different from one's own, but it is difficult for Westerners to enter the lives of regular Chinese. Beside the language barrier, Chinese people are also conservative, and without the introduction from a friend they do not associate with strangers. In their eyes Westerners are nothing but a bunch of *guilao* with money and sex.
>
> Chinese people have not the slightest interest in the lives of Westerners. In 1492 AD [*sic*], Zheng He [1371-1435] went seven times to the West without ever bringing back anything that was able to change Chinese humanist knowledge [*renwen zhishi*]. On the other hand Marco Polo's [1254-1324] travels and explorations brought back abundant humanist science [*renwen kexue*] to Italy. If he was to travel to China today, however, I am afraid he would have to return with only Beijing Opera masks and crude *qipao*'s bought in the tourist shop. (Ma J. 2002a: 2-3)

Here Ma Jian powerfully asserts himself on behalf of the only legitimate seers of 'China'—the seers 'in-between.' Like Lin Yutang, he sees beyond the framing of the 'window to China' that is usually allowed outsiders: 'not so detached from his own people as to be alien to them, and yet detached enough to comprehend their meaning,' as Buck wrote. While the passage quite possibly was not part of the 'draft' completed in 1999, it is also clear that it would strike a far better cord with a Hong Kong readership, or indeed with a readership of overseas Chinese, than with either a mainlander or foreigner (*laowai*/Westerner/*guilao*)—most of whom he appears to alienate in the above paragraphs. While the narrator's disdain for the former is not quite matched by the latter, it is clear that neither is essentially capable of achieving 'true' vision; only those who are able to transcend their objective configuration as either insider or outsider can se through the socio-cultural makeup. This position is challenged, however, when the narrator reaches the 'peripheries,' notably the Tibetan Plateau—extensive parts of which, as mentioned, had already been published in the 1980s.

Imperial eyes: cultural translation in Tibet

The English title of the final chapter 'A Land with No Home' differs from the HK version, 'The Buddhist Land that lost its Home' (失去家園的佛地); but although Buddhism appears in the PRC

title, the element of 'loss' and 'homelessness' is not surprisingly omitted, and the chapter is rendered 'The Buddhist Land that Towers into the Clouds' (高耸入云的佛地). Other references to 'occupation,' 'colonisation,' and the like are naturally also absent from the mainland edition; however, the issues of the Han being outsiders to this 'land' and the deep cultural chasm between the two are maintained. Faced with the magnificence of the Plateau, the narrator is initially stripped of his cosmopolitan eye and restored to his Han Chinese identity—only then to partly reclaim the 'vision' through the discourse of anti-imperialism. The following passage corresponds more or less in *Hong Chen* and *Red Dust*

> ——也是，走遍了中國，只有在這兒才使我感到，地球還有塊土地，時刻提醒你不應該站在上面。不知道那些出了國的人，是否也有這種外來感。我能感覺到藏民被共產黨壓的氣不過。這種仇恨意識像是家裡來了個客人，最後客人當家做了主人。失去的尊嚴多過權力 。
> I have been travelling for three years, but this is the first time I have sensed there are places on this earth where my feet should not tread. Perhaps that's how it feels for those people who go abroad. *The Tibetans have been pushed to the limit, they have a right to be angry. Imagine if you invited some friends for supper and they decided to move in and take over your house. It is not the loss of power that hurts, it's the loss of dignity and respect*. (Ma J. 2002a: 402; tr. Flora Drew, Ma J. 2001: 295)

In *Langji Zhongguo* the italicised passage is cut, and simply renders: 'I realise that the *ambience of the two sides are highly incommensurable*' (Ma J. 2002b: 303). Although the indiscrete allusion to colonialism is absent in *Langji Zhongguo*, the paragraph nevertheless sustains a narrative of Tibet's instrumental foreignness to the Han—places they are not supposed to be, or 'where my feet should not tread.' This point is not necessarily at odds with the political narrative of China's claim on the territory, however, but when the narrative proceeds to question the fundamental principles of the Chinese presence in Tibet—the 'civilising mission'—the space for diversity is cut short in *Langji Zhongguo*, and the cosmopolitan vision is blinded by its inability to historicise its object. By the same token, it might be suggested that the narrator had no other choice but to complete the paragraph in the two other cases with the reiteration of the anti-imperialist position; both in order to dissociate himself from Party discourse, but also to reclaim his 'transnational eye.'

There appear to be other obstacles to the discourse of difference in the PRC than the direct references to colonialism, however; these are apparently reached when difference becomes too radical to be conceptualised within the discursive framework of the 'civilising mission.' This is presumably also what went wrong with the publication of 'Liangchu nide Shetai'—and its denunciation as a 'filthy' book that 'defames the image of our Tibetan compatriots'—with which a

central part of the chapter coincides. The obstacles are reached in particular when the narrative turns to issues of polygamy, incest, child marriage, and the desecration of the dead.

In the pursuit of the latter, the 'spectacle' of the Tibetan sky burial, the narrator seeks—like Lu Gao and Yao Liang—away from Lhasa and into the countryside. Here he stays, as in most other 'peripheral areas,' at a Chinese service station—the imperial outpost—as the guest of a soldier named Li Ming. In *Red Dust* he is provided with the following information:

> 'The people live differently here,' he says. 'There are a hundred families in the village, and *in nineteen of them, the brothers all share the same wife*.' (Ma J. 2001: 304)

In *Hong Chen*, the passage seems to convey the same information, but is couched in a slightly different subjectivity:

> 當兵的說：這裡的藏民和拉薩的不同，和漢人的差距就更大了。村子裡有一百多戶農民，一妻多夫的就有十九戶。旺丹的家，兄弟四個只娶了一個老婆。
> 'The fact that the Tibetans here are dissimilar from those in Lhasa, *make their difference from the Han even greater*,' says the soldier. 'There are more than a hundred families in the village, and *in nineteen of them, several husbands share one wife. In Wangdan's family, four brothers only married a single wife*.' (Ma J. 2002a: 416)

In *Langji Zhongguo*, subjectivity is even further displaced, and the narrator is no longer provided with the information, but apparently makes the observation himself:

> 此地藏民也和拉萨不同，和汉人的差距就更大了。村子里有一百多户农民，还比较贫困。
> The Tibetans here are also dissimilar from those in Lhasa, which *make their difference from the Han even greater*. There are more than a hundred families in the village, and *they are still relatively poor*. (Ma J. 2002b: 313)

The first sentence in the excerpt from *Red Dust* differs from the two Chinese renditions insofar as it simply registers a 'difference,' while *Hong Chen* and *Langji Zhongguo* locates 'sameness' in the definition of 'difference' in a Han Chinese subjectivity. In *Red Dust*, the people here simply 'live differently'—the cultural difference between reader and narrator is understood; in *Hong Chen* and *Langji Zhongguo*, however, two differences are compared: the 'Tibetans *here*' are differentiated both from 'those in Lhasa' and 'the Han.' These differences are then measured against each other, and the Han is found to be located the farthest from these locals, presumably on a scale running from primitivism to modernity. It is also interesting to note that the excerpt from *Langji Zhongguo* is related by the narrator and not by the 'soldier' (Li Ming) as in the other two. While the narrator is supplied with the information by an intermediary in the former two, he emerges here as the

authoritative voice, relating this information to the reader himself—not that the local people are polygamists, but rather that they are still quite poor compared to Lhasa residents, and even more so when compared to the Han. It is not only that the reference to polygamy is overridden, the narrative is taken into an entirely different paradigm: that of economic development and the gradual distribution of wealth from the centre to the periphery. But although the 'locals' might still not quite have reached the level of the civilised Han, they are surely proceeding in the right direction. The following sentence—seemingly inconsequential in *Hong Chen* and absent from *Red Dust*—speaks volumes by its appearance in *Langji Zhongguo*. It appears in connection with a visit to a family by the narrator and the Chinese soldier, where three brothers are married to the same woman (or just a family of three brothers in the PRC edition). In *Hong Chen*:

> 黎明手在弄帽沿，臉上顯得心神不定。
> Li Ming fiddles with the rim of his cap and an uneasy expression appears on his face. (Ma J. 2002a: 419)

And in *Langji Zhongguo*:

> 黎明手在弄帽沿，忽然抬起头说，放心吧，随着国家的政策，这里会越来越好的。
> 是的，是的。格勒、达西和仓吉加措一齐点头。
> Li Ming fiddles with the rim of his cap and suddenly lifts his head and says 'don't worry, in accordance with the nation's policies this place will become better and better.'
> 'That's right, that's right,' [the three Tibetan brothers] Gelei, Daxi, and Tangji Jiacuo all nod their heads. (Ma J. 2002b: 315)

Here the *Langji Zhongguo* narrative suddenly emerges as a full-blown a mouthpiece for the central political line: not only are we supplied with the consoling words from the government functionary—that when 'the nation's policies' eventually spread to this outback area, these people will be rescued out of primitivism by socialist modernity; but we are also provided with the eager consent of three representatives for these locals—'that's right' they say and nod their heads in agreement.

In the English and HK editions the narrator and the soldier proceed to visit another polygamous family, this time two brothers who were formerly co-married to the 17-year-old girl Mima—a girl who had died during labour and is awaiting sky burial in a hemp sack in an inner room. The narrator is allowed to witness the ceremony, and describes how the body is chopped up and fed to the vultures as part of the ancient ritual—just as it had been described in 'Liangchu nide Shetai' and documented in *Ma Jian zhi Lu* in 1987. In *Langji Zhongguo* the narrator visits the brothers, but is then introduced to Mima who is alive and greets them in the inner room (and is not

married to both of them). There is thus no need for the burial, and the scene and all references to it (several pages) are edited out completely. Again, *Red Dust* corresponds more or less to *Hong Chen*:

> 過不久，當兵的站起，也叫我起來。他帶我走到門後，用手電筒照着一個用電線紮着口的麻袋，袋底是泥土做的幾塊土坯。
>
> ——這是她。張黎明說。
>
> 我把手電的光在麻袋上晃了幾下：裡面的米瑪是坐着，臉對着門後那塊牆，頭很底，大概是紮口時按下去的。
>
> The soldier stands up and beckons me to follow him. He leads me to the dark chamber and shines his torch on a hemp sack that is tied at the top with telephone wire and stands on a platform of mud bricks.
>
> 'That's her,' he says.
>
> I flash my torch on the sack. She appears to be sitting upright, facing the wall, head bowed low. Perhaps they had to push it down before they could tie up the sack. (Ma J. 2002a: 423; tr. flora Drew, Ma J. 2001: 309)

In *Langji Zhongguo*, however:

> 过不久，黎明站起，也叫我起来。他带我走到门后，手电筒光下，一个身穿藏袍的姑娘站在那里，害羞地朝我笑。
>
> ——米玛，这是我的记者朋友。黎明说。
>
> 你好。米玛笑了笑，低下了头。
>
> 黎明同她用藏语聊了一会儿，米玛急起来，忽然哀哀地哭起来，弄得我站也不是走也不是。
>
> 黎明安慰了她几句，米玛才平静下来，眼睛亮亮地笑了笑。我注意到这姑娘除了脏点儿长的还挺不错的。
>
> After a short while, Li Ming stands up and beckons be to follow him. He leads me behind the door and shines his torch. A girl dressed in a Tibetan dress stands there and smiles bashfully at me.
>
> Mi Ma, this is my reporter friend,' says Li Ming.
>
> 'Hello,' Mi Ma laughs a little and lowers her head.
>
> Li Ming chats with her for a while in Tibetan, and Mi Ma suddenly becomes agitated and starts to sob. I am not sure whether I should stay or I should go.
>
> Li Ming says a few consoling words, after which Mi Ma calms down. Her eyes glowing, she laughs a little. I notice that besides being a bit dirty this girl is actually quite attractive. (Ma J. 2002b: 318)

While the hierarchy of translation between the three editions is to some extent 'obscured,' due to the complicated history of the narrative, the above passage from *Langji Zhongguo* can with certainty be singled out as a clumsy act of 'translation' by the mainland editor; not only does the sky burial feature in the two other renditions of the text, but the same section was published (almost verbatim) in 1987 as part of 'Liangchu nide Shetai.' What is in fact a problematic act of 'ethno-tourism' in *Red Dust* and *Hong Chen* turns into a farce and insinuates, on closer inspection, a negotiation for sexual favours: the 'dirty' yet somewhat 'attractive' native is initially reluctant, but finally consents to the proposition by the intermediary.

Whether or not this innuendo is widely accepted, the interpretation suggests that the possibility of reading the passage as a narrative of 'sexual imperialism' has been deemed preferable to sustaining a narrative of 'ethno-tourism'—a search not for the Tibetan equivalent of 'Beijing Opera masks and crude *qipao*s,' but for the real deal: what is only visible to the cosmopolitan eye. The whole incentive behind the documentation of polygamy and the sky burial—and Ma Jian's insistence on the accuracy of these representations (and the authorities' insistence on the opposite)—drives a wedge between, not only the narrative identity in the three translations, but also between the narrative subjectivities that make up the internal composition of the works. The main body of the three texts betray concrete socio-political purposes. But although the object of narration (China and its peripheries) is sometimes adjusted to fit specific ideological or socio-cultural criteria in the three areas of publication, the most significant adjustment (or 'translation') that occurs, is the positioning and repositioning of the narrator and the writer. We are faced with three transnational narrators but also clearly three different ideological perspectives that guide the reading of the texts in specific directions and constructs, in the final analysis, entirely different works. These moves of extrinsic translation can be seen as entering a complex negotiation with the process of intrinsic 'distancing' by in various ways informing or denying this assertion of difference. The 'vision in exile' can be seen as subjected to manipulation (translation) in both the system and counter-system, across spaces and temporalities, and the narrative comes in this sense to reflect both a process of autonomisation from the Communist national forms as well as processes of homogenisation and domestication in world literary space. On a both narrative and discursive level, then, the work comes to reflect the precariousness of *distance* in the 'visions in exile.'

Conclusion

Inroads to a 'Counter-System' of Contemporary Chinese Literature

The framing of the present study around 'exile' has rested on the capacity of the concept to generate 'difference' while maintaining a certain amount of identification with its object of differentiation. Exile is *displacement* of identification not abandonment. Not expatriation or re-socialisation, but a state of suspended tension in the interstices between the 'insides' and 'outsides' of communal belonging. At the same time, it does not carry the ideological weight of a term like 'diaspora,' which places homogeneity and *return* as its central ethos, but is relentlessly an individual and existential affair. In terms of literature, the 'mutilations of exile' are ever-present; most obviously when negotiations for new identities fail, and the writer is thrown into the void of nonbeing, doubly 'outside' concepts of belonging and unable to 'grow' (to employ a frequently used metaphor) after having been 'uprooted' from the 'native soil' and 're-planted' in new surroundings. In this sense, exile is a form of censorship, a deletion from the national records not of a text or a passage in a text, but of an individual: a literary and bodily erasure from the nation.

Exile, however, might also become an empowering position and maybe even a necessary one; and it is here that the political and imaginary implications of the term most obviously diverge. Political exile from the People's Republic of China is often necessary in order to be able to write and publish, but also in the broader sense of acquiring not only 'freedom' but also, as Salman Rushdie phrased it, the '*assumption* of freedom.' If writers live in perpetual fear of political repercussions, there will always be an element of 'auto-censure' present in the creative process, and this constant (if only subconscious) realignment with Beijing Literary Time arrests the capacity of

renewal within the Communist literary system. Gao Xingjian and Yang Lian's expressed 'obsession with language' is born from these circumstances. In their eyes, political repression is effective because it controls not only the effects of language (in terms of censorship), but language itself: in the context of an absolute ideological appropriation of language, imaginative exile might be the only point of entry to the language hidden beneath the ideological makeup.

It is also on the basis of this perceived connection between language and 'imaginative exile' in the context of totalitarian politics that the cultural and geographical borders of the PRC become invested with a subversive potential—both in the sense of inscribing a subjective displacement (the 'necessary elsewhere') in the narrative as well as in the physical confrontation with, in Ma Jian's words, an entirely 'different landscape and culture'—which, as noted in Part Two, is also kept in place by 'language.' The discursive sensitivity of these borderlands, alone, makes for a ripe display of the internal frictions of the literary system, as in the case of Ma Jian, who was denied his right to vision, and subsequently to a voice, due to the application of an 'improper' language. The coupling of 'narrative and bodily movement' is not suggested as the only means of transcending the national forms, only that it points to a trajectory of distancing from a perceived centre that specifically appropriates the combination of these inner and outer movements (whether as a form of 'synthesis' or in more practical terms) in the construction of an alternative narrative position. This position is amplified and attuned in international space and allows for positioning as a *counter-system to the system*: distanced from the immediate effects of political oppression and founded in the international temporality of the World Republic of Letters.

To this effect, exile in the counter-system might also be turned into a new form of empowerment. In advance of the 2012 Berlin Literature Festival, for instance, Liao Yiwu 廖亦武 (b. 1958), who had fled to exile in Germany in 2011, commissioned an appeal for his friend and fellow writer Li Bifeng 李必豐—one of the many casualties of the Communist literary system far below the international radar. Liao implored 'fellow writers, worldwide human rights organisations and even my readers in the East and the West' to sign the appeal against Li's unjustified detention by the authorities in China (Liao 2012a). Within two or three days, Liao had received more than a hundred signatures—over seventy percent of which were from 'writers, poets, artists and journalists' (Liao 2012b). Significantly, Nobel laureate Herta Müller (b. 1953) and Ha Jin were among the first signees, and the Berlin Literature Festival subsequently organised an international network for the appeal. While it so far does not seem to have had any significant effect on the actions of the Chinese authorities, the whole situation bespeaks the internal workings of world

literary space as an autonomous and transnational 'republic of letters' fit to challenge the political hegemony of the Communist literary system, or any other system of oppression, by forming alliances across international space. It also illustrates the relationship and *identification* of the counter-system with this imaginary international body, while at the same time pointing to positions contained, but not consumed, by the system: Li Bifeng 'never gave up escaping, but he ended up unluckily in the hands of the national security service,' writes Liao (ibid). But although Liao himself has managed to escape the system, he is still linked to it in various ways—both in respect to these personal issues as well as in more general terms: 'as a writer, an eye witness and a recorder of time, there is no way to achieve freedom by escaping' (ibid). In this way Liao enunciates both the 'mutilations of exile' and exile as a new form of 'empowerment:' the linkage of the counter-system to World Literary Time provides a space of only partial freedom and does not facilitate absolute dissociation from the Communist literary system—despite perpetual fleeing.

The terminology applied in the present study has evolved into an admittedly somewhat imprecise and sometimes even slightly misrepresentative array of 'spaces,' 'fields,' 'systems' and 'counter-systems.' The latter in particular is tentative, but has been used only in the absence of a more adequate vocabulary. While, as it has been argued, a form of 'unity in opposition' as well as system of publication and distribution might be discerned, it is also clear that lines are significantly blurred between these 'systems' and, as also pointed out, the 'counter-system' is only conceivable as such on the basis of a common contradiction to the *system*, and acquires in this sense a specific 'exilic' identity in the various conceptions of the term listed above—but in now way the same sense of (*perceived*) homogeneity as the Communist literary system. Additionally, a number of writers operate on both sides and some make a slow transition from the inside to the outside; but while the physical and imaginative configuration of these boundaries has been the object of the present study, the counter-system in itself (or whatever one would want to call it) opens roads for further study of the structural workings and internal positioning in this transnational 'unity in opposition.' In this sense, the study also pay heed to Jing Tsu and David Wang's call to 'dismantle the hegemonic focus of a "national" Chinese literature,' but without disregarding the lingering 'discursive power' of the nation in international space.

In the analysis of these physical and imaginary boundaries, the application of the theoretical frame of 'literary space' has been useful in explaining the tension between narratives of 'Chinese literature' and 'world literature,' and while not directly accounting for the internal bifurcation into

opposing 'systems,' it assists the analysis of these by making them referential *both* to a national and an international literary space. In this sense, it also questions the unidirectional trajectory envisioned by the diagram in *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, mentioned at the very beginning of this study, by making the 'centre' referential to a wider space and even an 'international centre'—despite the flaws that this concept obviously also contains—and points instead to the capacity of positions in the interstices between the concentric circles to generate new 'centres' and new meanings of transnational belonging, and thus challenge the cultural hegemony of the 'inner circle.'

Literary space, moreover, does not equal citizenship. Gao Xingjian (who is often focal point of this type of discussion) has clearly contributed to Chinese literary space both before and after he became a French national; that he, in the later years, has actively tried to dissociate himself from any kind of 'Chinese identity,' even defining himself as a 'French writer,' similarly does not erase him from his former alignment. Ha Jin, on the other hand, is more clearly outside the space and has, as he puts it, been 'walled […] into a different territory' by the use of a different language; however, not only does he, as shown, retain a significant amount of his 'Chinese identity' in international space, he is also continuously preoccupied with tracing the boundaries between the system and the counter-system and is in this sense engaged in defining one of the basic principles in contemporary Chinese literary space. At the other side are writers like Ma Yuan, who test the boundaries from the inside but never crosses the 'point of no return' and, as has been suggested, might even to some extent 'realign' with Beijing Time in order to continue their existence inside the Communist literary system. Concepts of literary spaces, or indeed 'world literature,' are not able 'to account for everything,' but they provide a usable framework for analysing the tension in contemporary Chinese literature in terms of national belonging and identity, in the context of wider international processes.

In the present study is has been shown how the imagination of a 'national Chinese literature' came about through the negotiation between 'national' and 'international' literary principles: while the homogenised image of 'the west' has played (and plays) a crucial role in the dialectical reconfiguring of the national subject, a different, transnational approach was also evident—initially in Hu Shi's call for 'literature in the national language and a literary national language,' but later, in the hands of the writers of the 'third category,' appropriated in the quest for literary autonomy. The demise of both these quests was conditioned, on the one hand, by specific historical events

(primarily internal and external military aggression), but also by the gradual consolidation from the late 1920s onward of a highly politicised faction of the emerging field that was to provide the basic structure of the Communist literary system after 1949. The opting for political exile by people like Hu Shi, and their parallel demonisation on the mainland after the founding of the PRC, in turn, suggests clear traces of inroads to a counter-system of Chinese literary space—despite Gao Xingjian's insistence on the fact that no Chinese exile literature existed prior to 1989; Gao is right, though, that proper consolidation of a 'unity in opposition' did not occur until June Fourth—and particularly its aftermath—provided a both material and symbolic measure of differentiation.

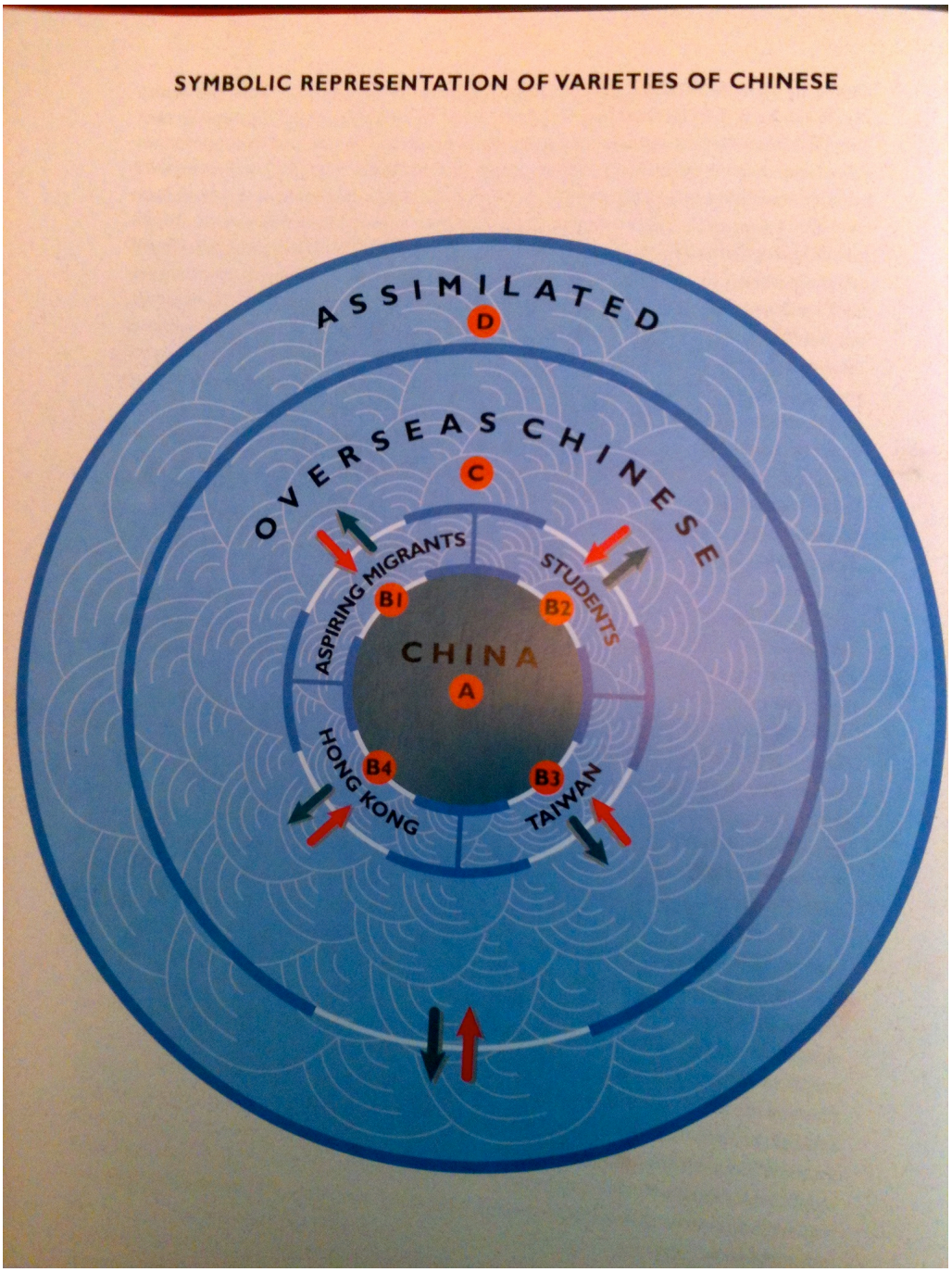
Gao's point, however, might also address the difference between the way his generation 'travelled out' of the system, as opposed to Hu's, which had grown up under the Republican regime and had, most significantly, *studied abroad*. They were already quite familiar with the 'outsides' of the system, and had even experienced (and partly been responsible for) its coming into being. Gao's generation, on the other hand, had grown up during the peak of political oppression, and the trajectory away from this centre of physical and spiritual tyranny, towards the margins of its influence and eventually across, must have seemed clearer in the minds of these later travellers. It was never an option, under Deng Xiaoping's controlled Reforms, that the aggravations in the artistic community might achieve anything remotely resembling the May Fourth Movement some sixty years earlier. While affiliations with the Democracy Movement are indisputable (at least on a symbolic level), it is fairly clear that, unlike the May Fourth generation, these writers were denied any direct access to the political arena (as well as ready opportunities to form unmonitored study societies, run independent journals, etc.) and had to pursue their struggle much more exclusively as a battle over aesthetics. This did not mean that the struggle was not political, but rather that it was founded in a logic of artistic independence that transcended nationalist designs and formed its alliances across international space. In the conceptual space of 'world literature,' a writer could slowly adjust the distance to the symbolic centre, travel between identities in the interstices of nations and languages, and base his or her political authority on the maintenance of exactly the right distance to a nationally defined literary identity.

Since the Reforms and Opening, the Communist literary system has become comparatively more integrated with both international space and its overseas literary communities; but friction obviously lingers in several areas. In recent years, the party-state has modified its strategy for international literary promotion as part of its programme to increase China's international cultural capital, or 'soft power;' but despite a significant amount of success with the implementation of this

strategy, tensions remain between the 'national' and 'international' factions of contemporary Chinese literature. The recent controversies at the Frankfurt and London Book Fairs most obviously illustrate the conflict between the CCP-sponsored 'major narrative' and its opponents—a variety of 'minor narratives,' issued from both within and without the PRC, that base their claim to legitimacy on the autonomous principles of the World Republic of Letters, rather than on the implied heteronomy in the literary policies of a governing political power.

The analytical space of world literature reveals the systemic construct of 'Chinese literary space'—a space sustained by a strong political centre, with boundaries that are policed by this centre but also continuously searched out and transgressed by individual writers. The study has registered the various perspectives of the 'visions in exile,' as well as the systems and spaces that keep them in place; it has followed the course of a selection of writers, not only as literary figures but most notably as *narrative beings*, across scattered corners of the world—carrying always with them a critical eye on their place of departure and a cosmopolitan sensibility that purports to see this place, as Gao Xingjian suggested in the epigraph to the introduction of this study, 'from a distance' rather than from the place itself.

Figure One



'Symbolic Representation of Varieties of Chinese.' In Lynn Pan , ed. (1998). *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*. London: Curzon Press: 14.

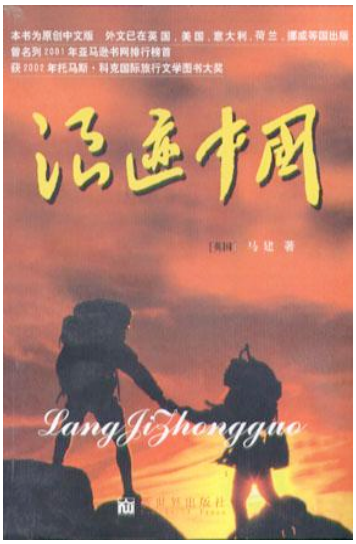
Figure Two

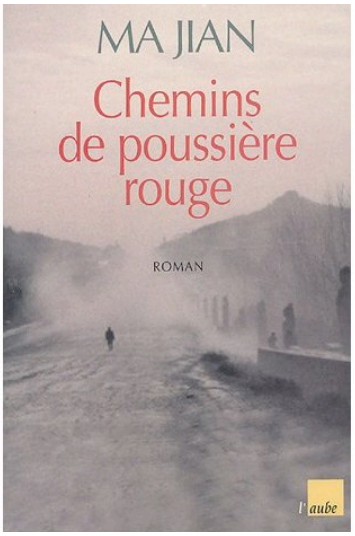
Zhongyang Meishu Xueyuan banhuaxi geming xianjinzhe he Hongweibing Zhandouzu 中央美術學院版畫系革命先進者和紅衛兵戰鬥組 [Revolutionary progressives of the Central Arts Institute block print department and the Red Army struggle group] (1972). 'Xuexi Lu Xun Geming Jingshen, Henpi Kongmeng zhi Dao' 學習魯迅革命精神，狠批孔孟之道 [Study Lu Xun's revolutionary spirit, criticise the ways of Confucius and Mencius].

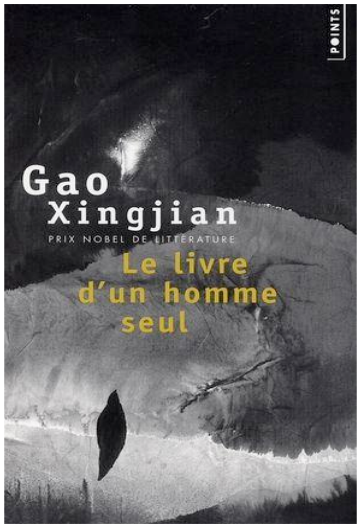
Figure Three:

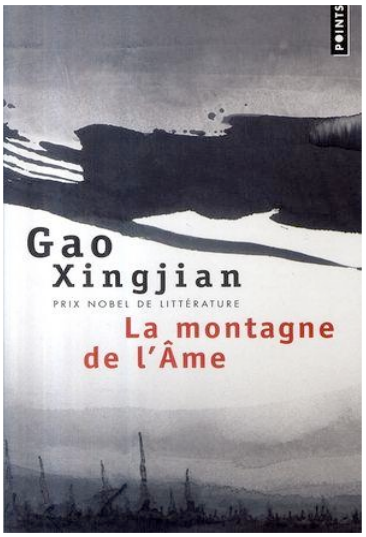
Shao Hua 邵華 and Shao Qinglin 紹青林 (1976). 'Mumin Ai Du Ma Lie Shu' 牧民愛讀馬列書 [Herdspeople love to read Marx and Lenin]. *Chineseposters.net*.

Figure Four









Left to right, top to bottom:

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